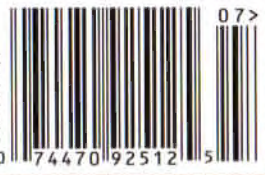


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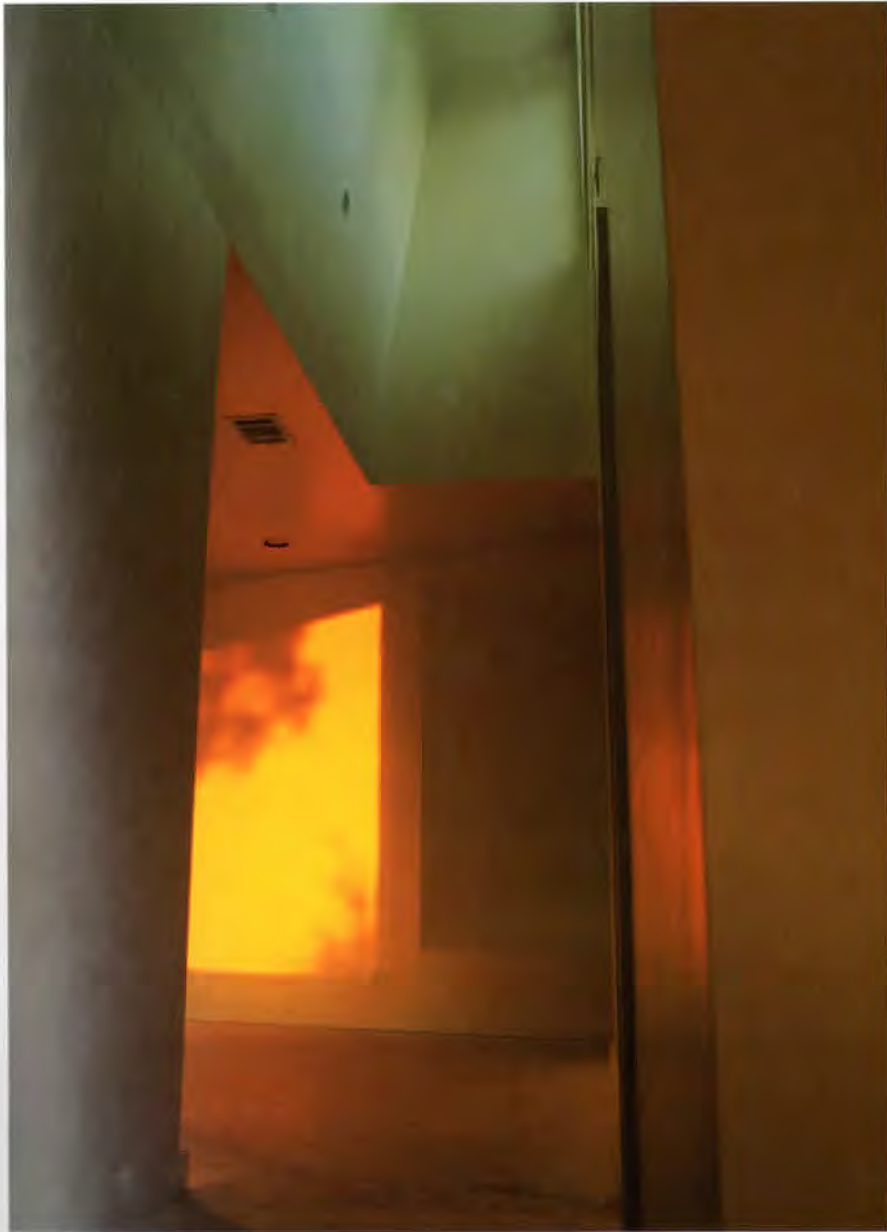


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On the cover: Wilson House, Brooks County, Carlos Jimenez Studio, Houston. Photograph by Hester + Hardaway.

Above: Tonnesen House, West of Austin, Kevin Alter and David Heymann Architects, Austin. Photograph by Kevin Alter, David Heymann, and Brian Lemond.

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Hearing Voices

IN THE MAY/JUNE ISSUE of *Texas Architect*, the one that featured wife-and-husband teams of architects, we did something unusual for us: We showed you the faces of the architects who worked on the projects we featured. In this edition, we go in another direction, also something of a change for us: We bring you the voices of the architects included. For this issue, which looks at questions about architecture of place, we asked the architects who produced the work to write about it. We asked them not to describe the buildings, but instead to discuss the ways that their projects are connected to place, the reasons decisions were made, the influence of place on their work. When Contributing Architect Elizabeth Danze and I started talking about what this issue could or should include, we quickly realized that the subject was too broad and our space too limited to allow conclusions to be drawn. Instead, we hoped to pose questions, broach topics, put some ideas on the table. I think that questions about what it means to create an architecture of place—Why do so many buildings look as if, and live as if, they could be anywhere? Does it matter? Do only architects care?—are ones we will return to. Letting the architects speak for themselves seemed like the best way to get the conversation started.

Bringing new voices to *Texas Architect* continues to be a major goal. If you have something you think others would like (or should like) to hear, or if you know someone you think could add to the discussion we intend this magazine to foster, please let me know. I'm always looking for writers and story ideas (usually, but not always, tied to our issue themes, listed at right) as well as projects.

One of the ways we have brought new ideas to the magazine over the past year has been through the involvement of the Contributing Architect. I thank all of those who have contributed in that role, and I particularly thank Elizabeth Danze, whose hard work on and enthusiasm about this issue were instrumental in creating the pages that follow. I hope you enjoy reading it as much as I enjoyed working on it with her. *Susan Williamson*

THE TA PROFILE:

JULY/AUGUST
 CONTRIBUTING
 ARCHITECT

Elizabeth Danze
 Partner
 Danze + Blood Architects
 Austin



Brenda Ladd Photography

- Where did you go to school?** Bachelor of Architecture, University of Texas at Austin; Masters of Architecture, Yale University
- If you could be something other than an architect, what would it be?** If not a client, a Dominican monk living at La Tourette Monastery outside Lyon, France
- Who was your mentor?** My female architect friends and colleagues have been my mentors
- What building would you most like to redesign?** The Amon Carter Museum in Fort Worth, partially because of its "shared" site with the Kimbell
- What is the most interesting building in Texas no one has ever heard of?** The water tower at Mother Neff State Park and the refectory and cabins at Bastrop State Park
- If you could be any architect, who would it be?** Julia Morgan
- Who is Texas' most important architect (past or present)?** O'Neil Ford

UPCOMING ISSUES

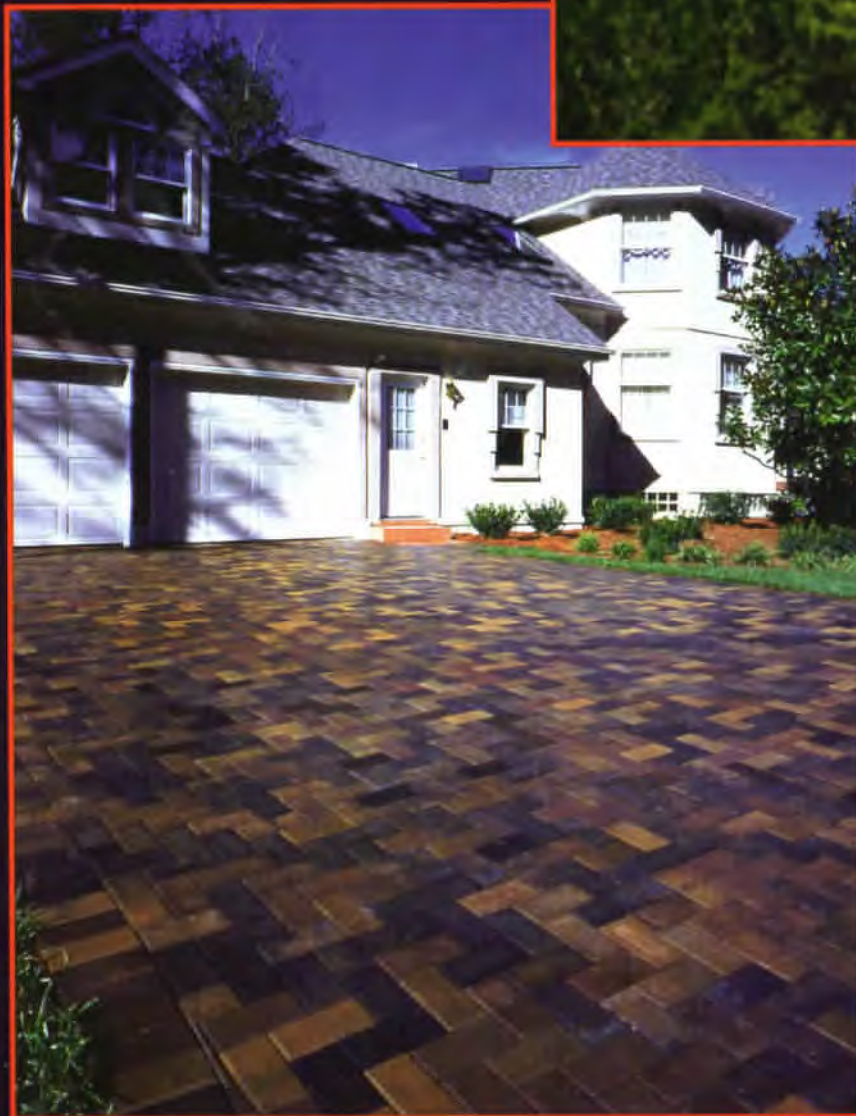
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- January/February 1999 (deadline 11 September) "Campus Planning and New Construction"
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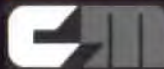


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Corrections

In "Of Note: Grand Openings," (May/June 1998, p. 14), the following corrections should be made: The Nancy Lee and Perry R. Bass Performance Hall was built for \$65 million; fundraising for the project has exceeded \$78 million. Architect for the facility was David M. Schwarz/Architectural Services, Inc., of Washington, D.C., who was also architect for Sundance West and East, not Sundance Square.

Patinated copper domes are features of the East and West façades, while the interior of the 80-foot diameter Great Dome of the Founders Concert Theater features white clouds floating above a cobalt blue sky encircled by a wreath of feathered wings.

In "Separate and Equal," (May/June 1998, p. 33) Robert Timme, FAIA, is the dean at USC.

In "Fitting In," (May/June 1998, p. 34) the contractor for the Kirk House should have been listed as Willowood, Inc. Team members were Natalye Appel, principal, Donna Kacmar, Shannon Sasser, Kevin Stevens, Tony Hartin, and Lee Olvera.

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News

Big Things on the Bayou 12

HOUSTON The opening of Bayou Place in Houston has brought a resurgence of people to downtown at night, in what city leaders hope is another step in the revitalization of the central business district.

Inching Forward 13

AUSTIN Efforts to revitalize the Drag in central Austin made one giant leap forward with a successful demo project—too bad there are several steps left.

A Home of Its Own 16

AUSTIN The burgeoning Austin Lyric Opera will be a new face on the city's landmark Barton Springs Road with the completion of an adaptive reuse.

Calendar 16

Big Things on the Bayou

HOUSTON January 1, 1998, marked more than the beginning of a new year in downtown Houston. With the grand opening of Bayou Place in Houston's Theater District, it marked the beginning of a new era. Part of a wave of urban entertainment centers sweeping through downtowns across the country, Bayou Place and a small but growing collection of bars and restaurants in the nearby historic district have transformed the image and character of downtown after hours. Bayou Place houses two anchor tenants, the Aerial Theater (a multi-purpose/live music venue) and the Angelika Film Center (an expansion of Angelika beyond its home base in New York City's SoHo), and four locally based restaurants in a classic shopping center layout.

The project was conceived in the late 1980s with a two-fold purpose. First, the City of Houston had replaced the Albert Thomas Convention Center with the George R. Brown Convention Center and needed a new use for the old property. Second, Central Houston, Inc., a business organization dedicated to revitalizing downtown, had determined that the obsolete Albert Thomas facility represented a golden opportunity to enliven the area of downtown known as the Theater District. Through a request for proposals sponsored by the city and Central Houston, Inc., the Cordish Company (from Baltimore, Md.) was selected to redevelop the old convention center as an entertainment complex.

The early to mid-1990s witnessed a series of announcements of plans and tenants for the project. Fortunately, the long wait paid off in today's excellent mix of activities and strong basic design. Gensler, the project architect, and the developers rejected the original plans for an interior mall; instead, every tenant is entered from the street side, which has returned Houstonians to downtown's sidewalks for the first time in years. This decision was based on more than just urbanistic goals. The developer was concerned that many local tenants would not be able to pay the common area charges for a mall format. Valet parking also emerged from this bottom-line thinking, and unfortunately, pedestrians must negotiate a Texas-sized valet operation to gain entry.

Gensler also chose to reverse earlier designs that masked the original architecture of the Albert Thomas, which was designed by CRS and opened in 1967. Gensler cleaned up the colonnaded structural frame but left it intact. The boldest move was to tear out many of the two-story blank walls enveloping the building and open the interior to

downtown. Individual tenants were allowed to create their own identity or storefront within this architectural frame. Some are more successful than others, but the overall effect enlivens the often monumental character of the Theater District.

With Houstonians excited, and in some cases surprised, by the project's success, plans are being laid for more urban improvements. In June, Texas Avenue streetscape improvements were started in



photo of Bayou Place by Houston Downtown Management District

front of Bayou Place; it is being rebuilt to provide an inviting pedestrian connection to the Rice Hotel. Later improvements will be extended to the Ballpark at Union Station, also on Texas Avenue. Meanwhile, the Cordish Company has an option on an annex to the Albert Thomas. While plans have not yet been announced, excitement is growing that future phases could further urbanize the Theater District and provide a direct waterfront connection to Buffalo Bayou, where Sesqui-centennial Park Phase II opened in May.

While Houston is a town where predictions often produce fools, Bayou Place is hoped to be just the opening volley in the transformation of Houston's vital but dull central business district into a real downtown.

Guy Hagstette

Guy Hagstette is director of capital projects and planning for the Houston Downtown District.

Inching Forward

AUSTIN It took two years longer than expected, but Austin is inching its way closer to renovating the well-known, well-traveled Drag, the ten-block section of Guadalupe Street stretching along the west side of the University of Texas (UT). The struggle—which included one demonstration project and a near-death letter from the general manager of the city's mass transportation agency, Capital Metro—has boiled down to a discussion of lanes: for buses, bikes, and light rail.

Efforts by the University Area Partners (UAP), a neighborhood group of merchants and residents, to renovate the slowly deteriorating Drag (see *TA*, November/December 1997) got a jolt in 1995 with several coincidences: the development of the UT master plan, which defined the Drag as an "edges priority"; the identification of the street by Capital Metro as a transit improvement initiative, which brought with it funds through the Build Greater Austin program; and support in the form of a resolution from the Austin City Council. A design plan creating a "pedestrian-dominated" project was developed by the local firm of Black & Vernooy. It included amenities such as wider sidewalks, trees, and historic lights mixed with four 10-foot-wide traffic lanes and two five-foot-wide bike lanes, and eliminated turning lanes. The initial schematics also dedicated one of the street's lanes to the expected, if distant, arrival of light rail.

The project's construction hinged on a November 1997 demonstration—with new lane widths marked by paint and bike routes indicated by pavers—that simulated the traffic flow impact. Kit Krankel, project manager with Black & Vernooy, says the demo turned out well for almost every party involved. "The demo project showed that there was very little impact on traffic, which was the university's main concern," she says. Some complaints came from cyclists who were used to riding in the old two-way lane on the university edge; some were also upset at riding between parked cars and the sidewalk on the merchant side of the street. "It was hard for the demo project to measure how well the design will work for them," says Krankel.

Cyclists were not the only group with reservations. Although Capital Metro was "pleased with the outcome of the demo project," says Andre Tanner, senior project manager with the agency, it is still unwilling to give the go ahead until a resolution is reached on the issue of lane width. At the time of the demo project, Capital Metro indicated its belief that 10-foot lanes

would not be wide enough to accommodate buses, which stretch 102 inches side-to-side but 122 to 132 inches mirror-to-mirror. For Capital Metro, the demo project cemented its position that outside lanes of 11 feet are necessary. "We need to figure out where to come up with the necessary footage," says Tanner. The issue "will get worked out by further consideration being given to 11-foot lanes," he says.

There is disagreement on where that two feet will come from. Matt Kite, assistant director of public works with the City of Austin, says that the city would like bike lanes, and the "general direction is to relocate the sidewalk line to accommodate the extra width needed for bikes and buses."

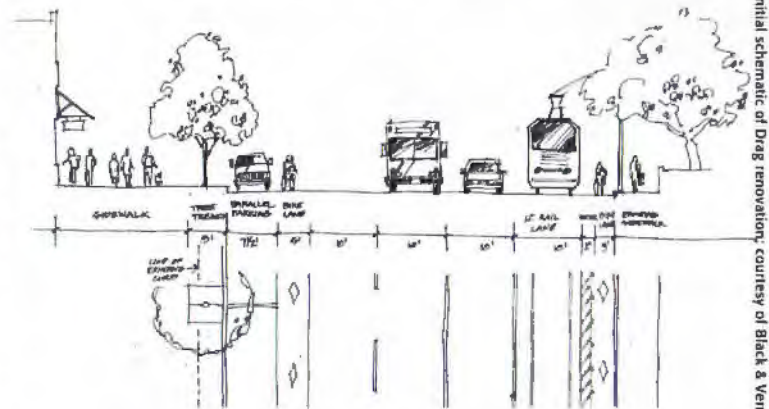
Krankel says, "We need to find two more feet, and to do that, we need to decide what's going to give. The lane width is really not up to us—it's a policy issue to be negotiated between the city and Capital Metro. . . . If we absolutely have to get two feet, it will come from the bike lanes—we'll have to eliminate them altogether."

For its part, UT, which at the start of the demonstration seemed the most hesitant party, has signed off on the project. "Once the demo project showed us that the traffic could flow, we kind of got out of it. . . . We are convinced the project is a good idea," says Steve Kraal, associate director of business services in the office of campus planning and facility management at UT.

The project's fortunes have also shifted with the light rail winds drifting through Austin. The city had focused its initial light rail plans on a track, running on existing railroad lines, through the east side of the city. The plans changed this spring, with a new proposal for an initial line running through the center of the city and including the Drag, says Krankel. About the same time the new proposal was released, the Capital Metro board received an abrupt letter from the agency's general manager calling for the cancellation of the \$2.25-million Drag project. The board eventually restated that it was behind the project, and wanted it to move forward, says Krankel. "They want us to

reexamine how light rail will fit. We need to make them comfortable that none of the improvements will have to come out when light rail goes in."

Kite, with the city, assesses the light rail fears as unfounded. "Light rail has no bearing in my mind on this project. The area is already planned to accommodate it. It would have a bearing if we were building an expensive project in the area," he says. For Kite, the more pressing issue is the effect



Initial schematic of Drag renovation, courtesy of Black & Vernooy

the sidewalk and street relocation will have on the city's utilities. "Utilities are a major component of most street projects. . . . We need to move expeditiously to resolve the utility issues. . . . If the design is changed, it affects the utilities," says Kite.

For UAP, what started as an attempt to improve the downward slide of the street has turned into a crash course on the complex, interrelated layers involved in an urban project. "Roadways are used for more than just surface transportation," says McHone. "[On the Drag], there is a tremendous amount of east-west pedestrian traffic, and a significant amount of east-west vehicular traffic. It is also a major transit corridor, and serves as an underground utility delivery system. The project affects all the layers."

If all the parties are able to hash out the remaining details, construction should begin during the early months of 1999, with phase one complete by August 1999. Phases two and three would be completed in subsequent years, based on available funds.

The general consensus is still that the process has been an important one. "Everybody will have to coexist, as they already do. We will come to a compromise that accomplishes everything. . . . This is one of the first times we've all come together. And in spite of our best wishes, there are things we don't have control over," says McHone.

Kelly Roberson

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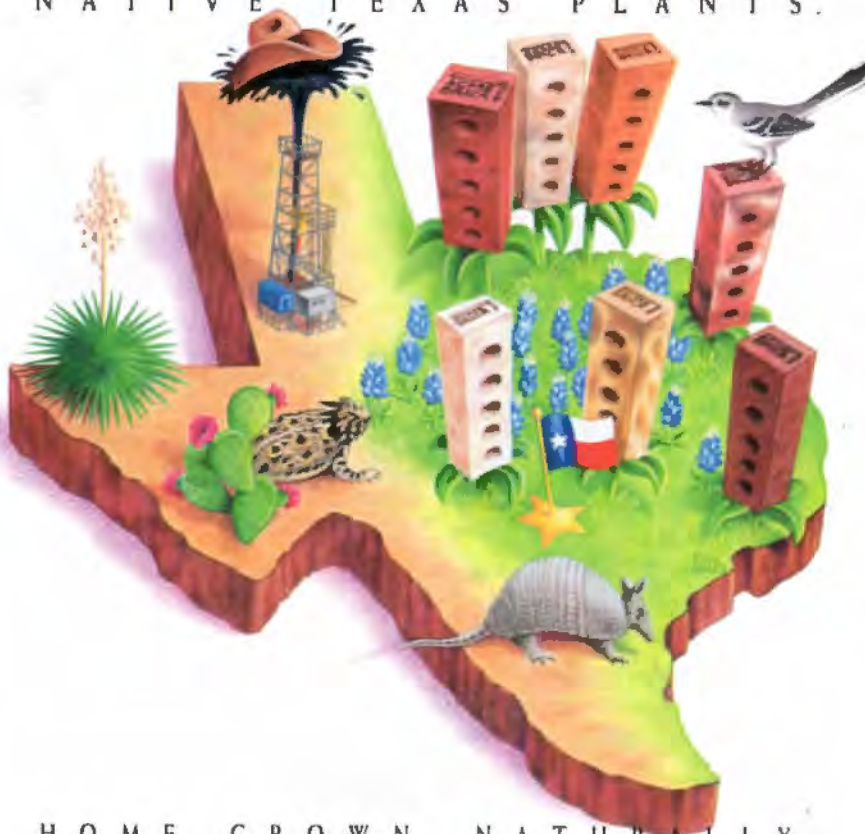
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A Home of Its Own

AUSTIN The eclectic mix of businesses, restaurants, and shops on Austin's Barton Springs Road will add another element to its fold next spring: the headquarters of the Austin Lyric Opera. The 11-year-old organization has hired Lake/Flato Architects of San Antonio to adapt an existing one-story structure (which saw its last incarnation as a restaurant) and infill a three-story addition to a piece of land at the corner of Barton Springs and Bouldin Road. The building will house administrative offices, a rehearsal space, and a community music school, and signals an increased community presence for the burgeoning organization.

The group was founded in 1986 as Austin's first professional opera company; its production schedule has blossomed into three full operas over twelve performances each year. In addition, it offers educational programs for elementary grades through high school, including a touring program and in-school residencies.

Two-and-one-half years ago, general director Joe McClain says, the opera realized it wanted to "take our destiny into our own hands. We were leasing space, and over the long term, that's not smart." And if they found the right place, the opera would no longer have to search Austin each year for the most available, least expensive rehearsal space.

In January 1998, the opera bought the property on Barton Springs, and kicked the project into high gear, holding a loosely framed competition among six firms: Lake/Flato Architects; Graeber Simmons and Cowan, Austin; Team Haas, Austin; Overland Partners, San Antonio; Cunningham Architects, Dallas; and Robert Jackson & Associates, Austin. Each made a conceptual presentation, says McClain. "All of them came in with mind-boggling work—all of it was brilliant. Lake/Flato best hit our sort of vision," says McClain. "They had a unique grasp on retrofitting the existing structure."

That existing structure is a 10,000-square-foot free-span building—large, open, and unencumbered—that will be divided between re-

hearsal space and the community music school. Right now, says Ted Flato, FAIA, of Lake/Flato, it's a "big volume, a black box. We are not changing it dramatically. . . . We wanted to be smart and efficient with that [building] and spend the money on the new building." The new three-story, 8,000-square-foot addition will form an L with the old building to enclose a plaza/parking lot lined with trees.

The complex, says Flato, "is as flexible as possible so they can grow into it. The challenge was not to overthink it." The street façade of stained tilt-wall concrete cuts out the corner in



Rendering of new Austin Lyric Opera building by Lake/Flato

the image of an old movie house; the back of the addition is an open scaffold-like system, says Flato, that could provide space for outdoor performances. A roof-top terrace will also act as a sunshade; inside will be an exposed structural system, loft-like, raw, and *ad hoc*, says Flato.

The opera has raised \$2 million of the needed \$2.5 million for the project—and for the agency, it's a heady time. "It's hard to get your brain around what it will mean for us," says McClain. In addition to a visible headquarters and a permanent, first-class rehearsal space, there is the new community music school, the first of its kind in Texas. The nonprofit organization will offer high-quality music instruction to people of all ages and skill levels, from early childhood classes to private instruction. "This is the first time in the country that an opera company will operate a music school," says McClain. "The company has a real mission to serve and educate the community. This is a real tool to do that, to be connected in a way we can't through performances." The school will begin classes in January 2000. **KR**

CALENDAR

"Big Sky"

The Arlington Museum of Art will present *Big Sky*, an exhibition of drawings and a five-foot-by-twenty-five-foot basswood model of the first phase of Big Sky, Texas (see this issue, pp. 40-41). The new community, sited on a one-square-mile section of prairie north of the Dallas/Fort Worth metropolitan area, was planned and designed by Kevin Sloan of The Hillier Group and Max Levy Architect; the model was completed by Max Levy's graduate design studio at the University of Texas at Arlington. Arlington Museum, Arlington (817/275-4600), THROUGH AUGUST 1

"Gerardo Rueda: A Retrospective"

Painting, collage, and construction by one of Spain's leading abstractionists, Gerardo Rueda, will be presented by the Meadows Museum at Southern Methodist University in *Gerardo Rueda: A Retrospective*. Rueda's work is characterized by wit, compositional elegance, and subtle use of color; he regularly works with geometric units and with free, more organic pictorial components. Rueda began painting in his teens; the earliest piece in the exhibition is from 1948, although most are from his work in the 1980s and '90s. Meadows Museum, Dallas (214/768-2740), THROUGH AUGUST 9

Scenes of Domesticity

More than 50 paintings that examine the cultural and social issues that occupied the Age of Enlightenment and its great thinkers will be on view for *Intimate Encounters: Love and Domesticity in Eighteenth-Century France*. The exhibition shows scenes of everyday life, a category of art that became increasingly important during the reign of Louis XV. The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (713/639-7300), THROUGH AUGUST 23

"Modernism: The Art of Design 1880-1940"

Works from the arts and crafts movement, art nouveau, the Wiener Werkstätte, De Stijl, the Bauhaus, and art deco—all disparate but connected movements—are brought together for an exclusive Kimbell Museum show of *Modernism: The Art of Design 1880-1940, The Northwest Collection*. The exhibition marks ten years of collecting, and is the first time the 200 pieces will be shown together. This representative group of innovative artist-designers produced some of the most original, classic, and characteristic creations in a neglected field of collecting. Kimbell Museum, Fort Worth (817/332-8451), THROUGH SEPTEMBER 13

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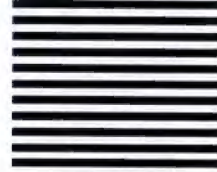
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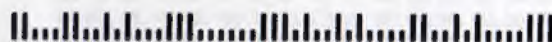
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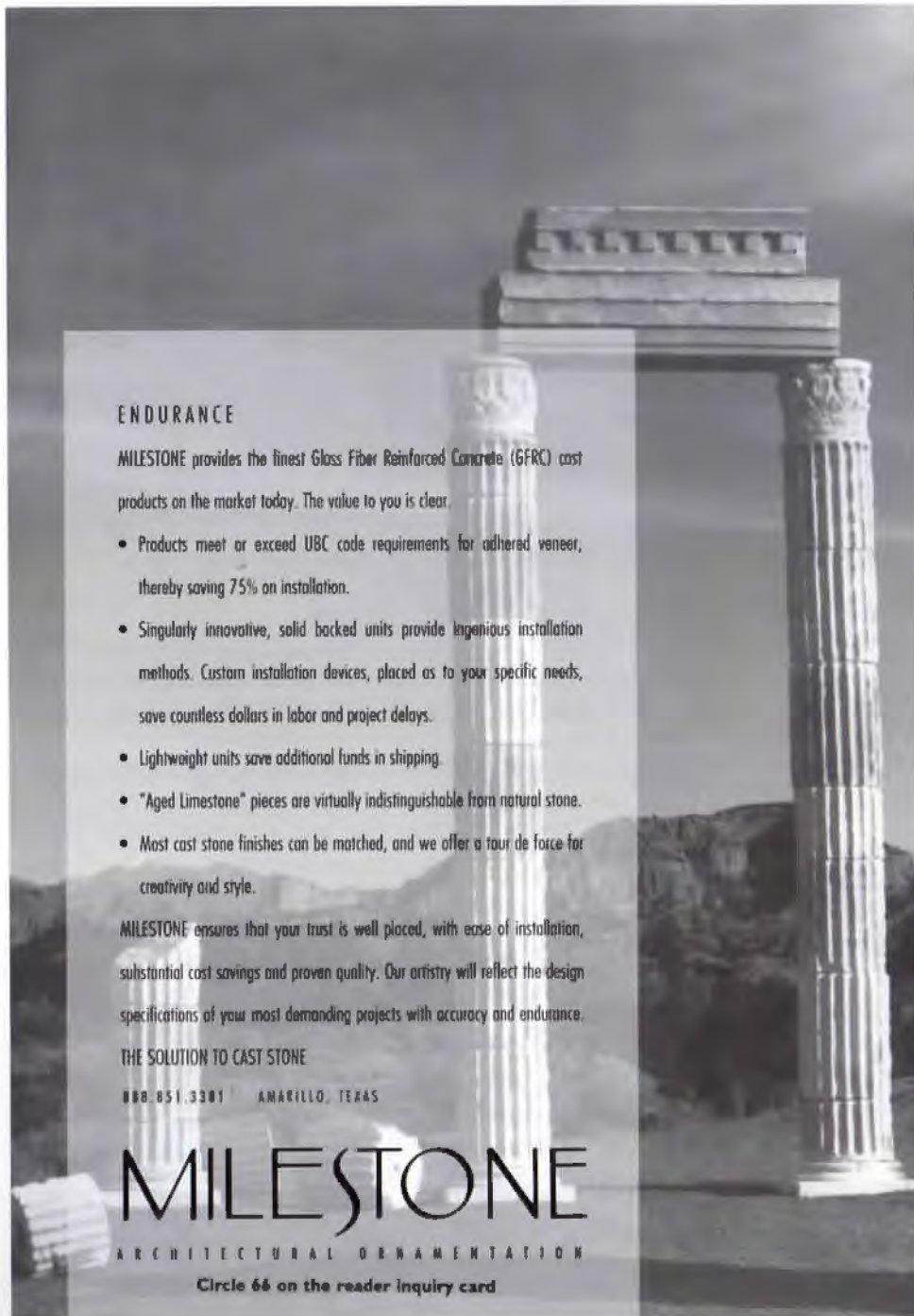
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Down by the River

PROJECT *The South Bank, San Antonio*

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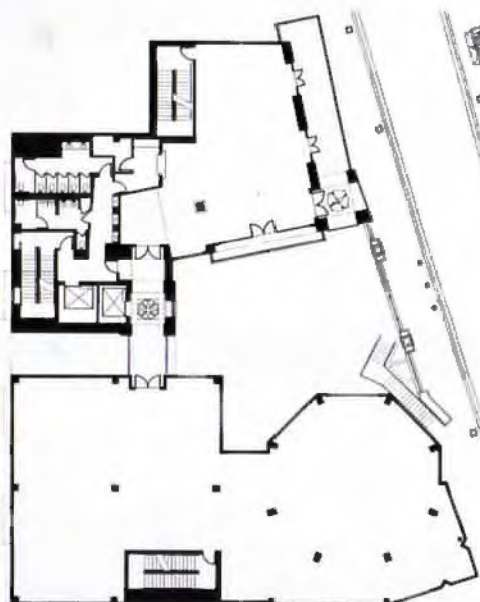
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2

1 The Southbank Project is on a 23,000-square-foot site that used to be street-level surface parking. The goal was to modify the street-level development into individual buildings with unique façades, while creating a public gateway to the river and extending restaurant and retail activity. Openings that serve as retail arcades were developed between the buildings and landscaped to invite the public to the river.

2 All building services and delivery accesses were consolidated and concealed below grade. Individual buildings sit on a podium of 20,000 square feet of leasable restaurant space, carved from the site at river level. There are three public stairs, as well as a public elevator for the handicapped.

3 Brand + Allen emphasized individual building façades rather than one development with a single aesthetic. Each was done in a variety of early Texas



Practice Q&A

PETE ED GARRETT is senior design principal of Morris Architects in Houston. He answered questions for *Texas Architect* on trends in the market of recreation and entertainment architecture.

How has the market for entertainment architecture changed or evolved in the last ten years?

Entertainment as a project segment has evolved to include other disciplines such as retail, hospitality, and education. No longer are theater venues "stand-alone;" they are combined with other activities to create synergy for the facility. For example, the IMAX-3D Theater at Moody Gardens brings an additional educational element to the complex through entertainment. The visitor can view a film about the fragile nature of the tropical rain forest, then go directly to the rain forest pyramid to be in the actual environment. A second film might feature an aquatic theme, after which the guest can go next door to the aquarium. Using the entertainment medium of IMAX to reinforce the educational theme of the program at Moody Gardens reinforces both activities. Entertainment has become a tool used for education.

Because of the complexity of IMAX theaters and facilities of a similar scale, these ventures can only be undertaken by a group that understands the potential revenue and also the risks involved. Proper demographic and feasibility studies must be made to confirm the success of such ventures.

"Practice Q&A" continued on page 22

motifs, increasing the individual identity of each tenant. Native stone and local brick were used to blend the structures with other buildings along the river. In addition, full-grown existing river cypress trees were saved.

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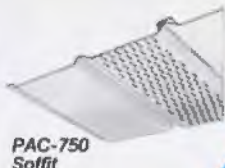


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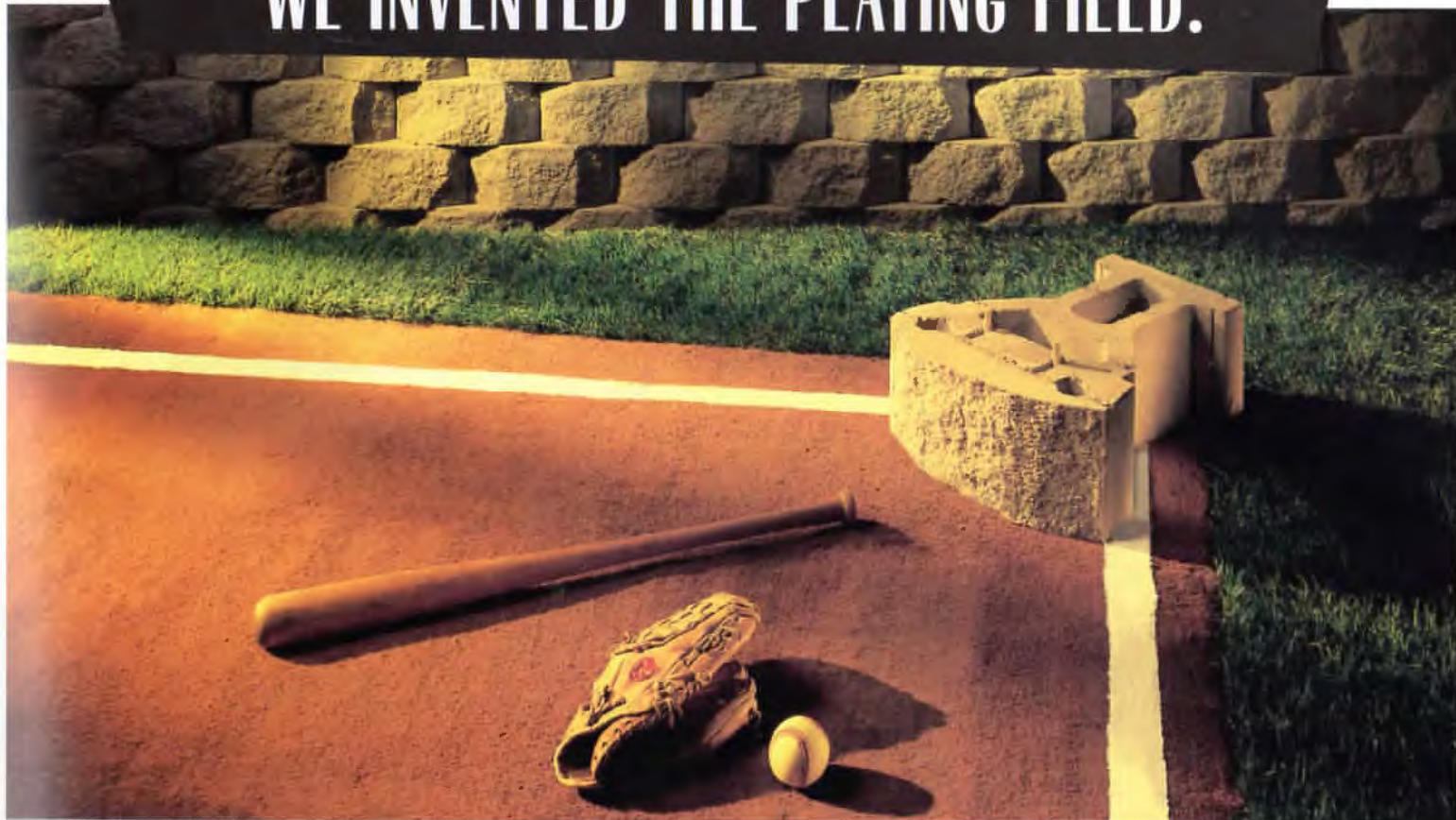


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"Practice Q&A" continued from page 19

What forces have driven those changes?

One is familiarity with computers and computer technology. Young people are exposed early to interactive games and the same old museum experience of "walk-and-look" doesn't keep them interested. Museum attendance was declining without the immersion of the visitor in the experience. Another factor is the lack of quality time—that is, a large segment of our population has less time for leisure and to be with their families. They are looking for an experience that will be memorable and fulfilling and not waste their time, as well as something they can't do at home. At home, people have computers and computer games, big screen TVs, internet access, sound systems that are concert quality. Why leave the comfort of your home if you can't improve the total experience? The entertainment industry had to provide bigger, better thrills, to blast people out of their cocoon.

Museums and educational facilities, as well as purely entertainment venues, have to change to appeal to the viewer and give them an experience they cannot get at home.

What are the factors influencing the shape of today's entertainment projects?

Entertainment projects as provided in amusement and theme parks feed the need for the adrenaline rush. . . . The competition among the theme parks, together with constantly evolving technology, drives the need to be bigger, better, and exceed the thrill from the last attraction. . . . We learned that unless there is something new every year, the public has the attitude of "been there, done that, bought the t-shirt."

How are contemporary projects different from those of 10 or 20 years ago?

Contemporary entertainment projects are much more complex now. Planning and designing such a facility requires more specialized attraction consultants, more documentation, and much more coordination by the architect. Concerns of sound separation, vibration of projection equipment, and electrical shielding are critical. Design and construction schedules of contemporary entertainment projects are also faster paced. The goal is to get the attraction open as soon as possible because of revenue generation and commercial tie-in.

"Practice Q&A" continued on page 23



1



2

Take Me Out . . .

PROJECT Prototype Press Box/Concession Facilities, City of Lubbock Parks, Lubbock

CLIENT City of Lubbock Parks and Recreation Department

ARCHITECT SLS Partnership—Architects, Engineers, Planners, Lubbock

CONTRACTOR ADC, Inc.

CONSULTANTS RTR Engineers, Inc. (structural); Compliance Services Group, Inc. (MEP)

PHOTOGRAPHER Scott Schellbase, JQT Visual Productions

1 SLS Partnership developed a generic plan design for the City of Lubbock Press Box and Concessions Stands. The stands will be located in city parks, and plans are flexible enough to accommodate a multitude of different adaptations.

2 Materials—including maintenance-free masonry and metal roofs—were selected for longevity and durability, and mixed with bright colors and lattice awnings.

3 The buildings are used by the city's Little Leagues, and strive to generate a feeling of sports excitement and provide user-friendly integration.

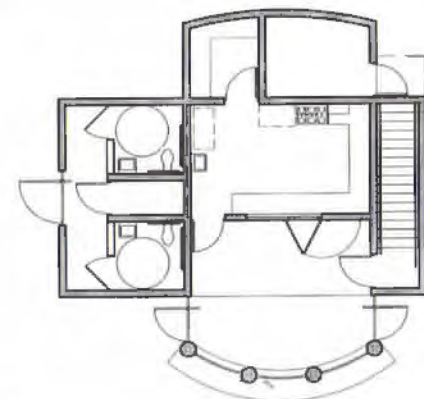
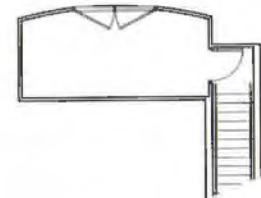
4 Each of the three prototypes has space for accessible restrooms, concession areas, and general and ballfield storage.

RESOURCES

Foundation: R.E. Janes Company; **structure:** Georgia Pacific, Pine Lodge Truss, Inc.; **wall surfacing:** MBCI, Inc., Featherlite Corp., Gold Bond Building Products; **windows:** Nissen & Co., Inc.; **doors:** Republic Doors/Frames; **ceiling surfacing:** Georgia Pacific; **roofing:** MBCI, Inc.; **waterproofing/sealants:** Chemprobe Technologies; **insulation:** Owens/Coming; **partitions:** Featherlite Corp.; **paint and stain:** Sherwin-Williams; **hardware:** Hager Hinge LTD Canada, Corbin-Russwin; **signage:** Andco Industries Corp.; **stairs/treads:** Georgia Pacific; **lighting:** Moldcast, Kenall



3



4

"Practice Q&A" continued from page 22

How has technology affected the form of entertainment architecture?

Technology has reached everyone. For example, if you have a high-quality sound system at home and in your car, you will not accept a sub-standard sound system in a theater where you have to buy a ticket. The lowest common denominator of technology has been raised. We demand a larger experience in our entertainment venues or we won't leave home. Technology is a tool. When it is used for entertainment or education, it can add dimension and vitality to immerse the viewer in the experience.

What lessons can educational institutions like history and science museums learn from the world of entertainment architecture?

With declining attendance at history and science museums, there is a need by these older, traditional museums to compete for the family time and dollar. Therefore museums are moving toward an entertainment approach through participatory and dynamic exhibits. These exhibits are providing education through the emotional experience. We now call this combined educational and entertainment experience "edu-tainment."

How has the role of the architect changed or developed as this market area has expanded?

The role of the architect has changed as he or she is called upon to implement a vision. The architect is looked upon as a problem solver to manage all the various consultants, designers, educators, and actors to produce with a common goal. With this high competition, the business of architecture has become an utmost requirement. The business of exhibit cost, attendance, throughput, and revenues become the influencing factors that shape and theme the architecture. **TA**

RESOURCES

Foundation: Houston Shell & Concrete; **structure:** Safety Steel, Houston Shell & Concrete, Delta Metal Products Inc.; **wall surfacing:** Dryvit, Vista Wall, Viracon, United States Gypsum, Veazey Corp., Decoustics; **windows:** Atlas Architectural Metals, H.G.P. Industries of Houston; **skylights:** Viracon; **doors:** TX Steel, Krieger Steel, Door Pro Systems, Wayne Dalton of Houston; **ceramic tile, terrazzo, and stone:** American Marble Mosaic; **floor surfacing:** Pavestone, Armstrong, Interface & Durkan; **ceiling surfacing/system:** U.S. Gypsum, Armstrong; **partitions:** Delta Metal Products, USG, National Gypsum Co.; **paint and stain:** Devco (ICI Paints)



Taking Shape

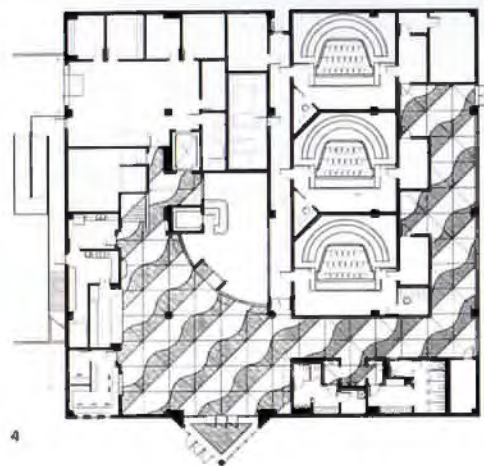
PROJECT Moody Gardens Discovery Museum, Galveston
CLIENT The Moody Foundation
ARCHITECT Morris Architects, Houston
CONTRACTOR Gilbane Building Co.
CONSULTANTS Walter P. Moore & Assoc. (structural/civil); CHP & Associates (MEP); Jack Evans & Associates (acoustical); Cermac Peterka, Person Inc. (wind engineer); P.S.I. (materials testing); NASA, Johnson Space Center (exhibits)
PHOTOGRAPHER Aker Zvonkovic

1 The latest addition to the 242-acre "edu-tainment" Moody Gardens complex is the Discovery Museum. A pink glass pyramid houses the permanent and traveling exhibits, IMAX ride-film theaters, gift shop, and concession areas, and reflects the forms used in an earlier phase of the project.

2 Efforts to draw visitors through the complex begin with a ribbon-like wave along the lobby ceiling; the wave continues along the stairway to the second-floor exhibit area.

3 Over 40 exhibits, including 30 that are interactive, from such resources as NASA, National Geographic, and the Smithsonian Institution are showcased in interiors that also allow visitors to look outside to the adjacent Gulf of Mexico and existing pyramid. The space is designed to allow frequent changes in exhibition materials.

4 The museum is located between the existing Rainforest Pyramid and the Aquarium, currently under construction. A steep-framed canopy (to the left on the plan) connects the museum to the older structure, and provides shelter from the sun.



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Of Place



The aspects of things that are most important to us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity.

Ludwig Wittgenstein

WHAT MAKES A BUILDING OF ITS PLACE? Without resorting to the typical and familiar explanation of the regional vernacular that can sometimes favor assumption and style, the projects shown on the following pages offer a meaningful response to building in a specific place, culture, and environment. These projects respond to universal concerns of space, light, materials, and connection to context as well as to other issues associated with the regional vernacular, but not with predictable or superficial results. Steven Holl, in his book *Anchoring*, provides an articulate explanation of the implications of this kind of connection between building and site:

The site of a building is more than a mere ingredient in its conception. It is its physical and metaphysical foundation. The resolution of the functional aspects of site and building, the vistas, sun angles, circulation, and access, are the “physics” that demand the “metaphysics” of architecture. Through a link, an extended motive, a building is more than something merely fashioned for the site. Building transcends physical and functional requirements by fusing with a place, by gathering the meaning of a situation. Architecture does not so much intrude on a landscape as it serves to explain it.

The projects presented here represent a range of explanations of the landscape. Unselfconscious in appearance, the Tonnesen House by Kevin Alter and David Heymann provides a mechanism that allows the client to embrace the particular qualities of this site. The house continuously suggests a variety of ways to live in and on the site throughout the change of seasons and over time. The Wilson House by Carlos Jimenez represents a literal unfolding and opening up of the building onto the site. The harsh south Texas landscape as explained by Jimenez is one that is known by its sensory and sensual qualities. Max Levy and Kevin Sloan, in their story about a new community planned for the plains north of Dallas, advocate an architecture that would provide a new way of seeing the prairie landscape that sprawls across the northern third of the state.

The complex urban context of the International Center by Lake/Flato Architects and the suburban bustle surrounding the Oblate Renewal Center by Sprinkle Robey Architects suggest the need for a different kind of architectural explication. In responding to the enormous number of subtle and complex forces on its downtown site, the International Center becomes the focus for a distinct way of connecting with the River Walk and its surroundings. The architecture at the Renewal Center, on the other hand, alludes to a connection with its mission past by working mostly to define the spaces it encloses.

Style cannot provide the means to genuinely respond to place. Instead, such a response looks at a given style suspiciously, longing instead for the essence beneath. This truer response resists the copying of the past in the name of the vernacular and similarly resists naive contextualism. The projects included in this issue provide a sincere testing of these kinds of assumptions. Honest, direct, and unpretentious, each celebrates the potential for inventiveness on a particular site and is thereby truly of its time, of its place. **Elizabeth Danze**

Elizabeth Danze is a principal in Danze + Blood Architects of Austin; she is the Contributing Architect for this issue (see page 5).



Inside Out

by Kevin Alter and David Heymann

THE HILL COUNTRY WEST OF AUSTIN was once the poorest region in Texas, the last to be electrified. Today it is booming. A landscape once just able to sustain a modest farming and ranching economy, it is in many places becoming a continuous suburb at immense scale, with immodest new homes and starter communities erupting overnight. Economic and social realities aside, the basic impetus to dwell in these hills is clear. An everpresent sun is tempered by breezes, and offset by shallow clear rivers that flow over limestone beds shaded by massive bald cypress and pecan. Live oak mottes and wildflowering fields line the valleys between dry ridges studded with stands of juniper and cedar. More temperate than the Gulf Coast—almost Mediterranean—the Hill Country can nonetheless be exceptionally severe, with searing heat, sudden freezes and flash floods that make the valleys risky to inhabit. These factors, combined with the inherent poverty of the region, have generated a vernacular architecture long on common sense and devoid of pretense. Oftentimes, to dwell here means simply catching both a bit of shade and breeze, or alternatively, a pocket of sun.

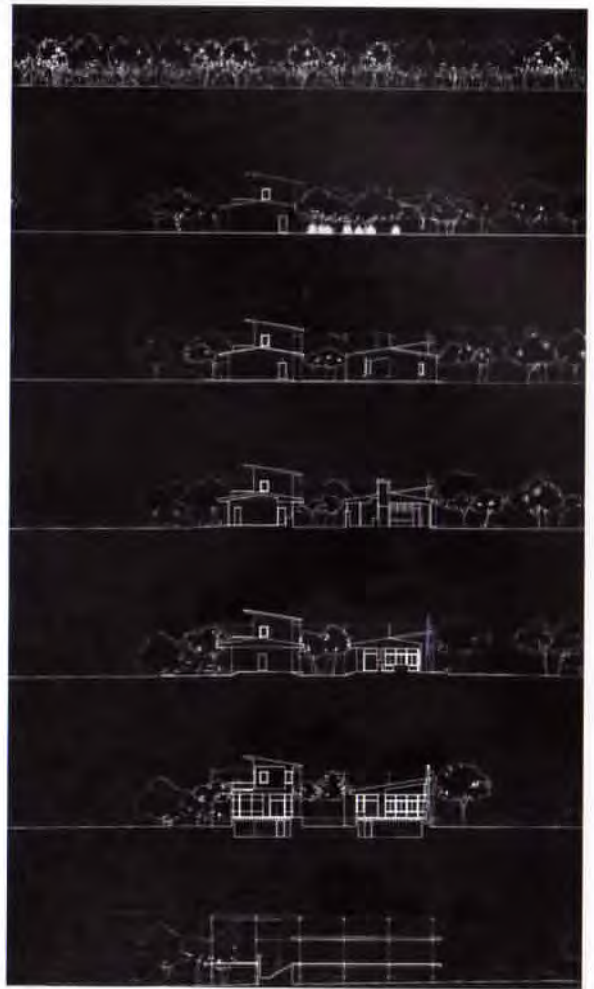
For better or worse, the Hill Country draws out a passionate nostalgia from Texans that is the single greatest formgiver to the wave of construction currently remaking this landscape. It would seem that every new house seeks to remind its inhabitants of humble roots and country stock and to recover an innocence lost. "I remember when" says the latest construction wistfully, its foundation still curing.

The past may be one thing, but a 5,000- to 8,000-square-foot, climate-controlled, limestone-slathered starter mansion for Range Roving ex-urbanites is something else all together. Beneath a veneer of sensibility lies the murky consequence of technology-based comfort, divorced from the landscape's possibilities and pleasures. How long will the very qualities that inspire our passion for the Hill Country stand up to this sort of bludgeoning remembrance?

Our house for the Tonnesen family also seeks to respect its parent landscape. Unlike its neighbors, it seeks to remain true—and respond directly—to certain over-arching factors: the specific qualities of the site as a location for dwelling and construction, the vagaries of the program as a source for meaningful inhabitation, and the means and consequences of modest construction and local technology. The common-sensible triangulation of these three factors arguably constitutes the basis of an active vernacular landscape, one capable of generating buildings that are not quite like anything seen before, yet familiar nonetheless. Familiarity is here predicated on recognizing the *means* rather than the *ends* of a vernacular. And architectural form arises as a response to a set of circumstances rather than from the desire for a preconceived image. Our goal is to keep the landscape alive. Isn't that the primary program of the new Hill Country: to live *in* this particular and desired landscape?

The house is designed for a couple—a doctor and a psychologist—who seek to gradually retire to the Hill Country. A weekend house, it will become their primary residence in a few years. The clients' three children are grown, but the family is close and social, and share a common love for an active outdoor life.

Their property along the Pedernales reconstitutes, in section, the basic order of the larger landscape, and the house makes habitable and intensifies this sectional order. A dense juniper forest thins to a stunted live oak grove that is bookended by two mature cedars. The grove gives way to a strip of harshly exposed land sloping



4
FIRST FLOOR PLAN

- 1 GARAGE
- 2 BREEZEWAY
- 3 SCREENED PORCH
- 4 LARGE PORCH
- 5 LIVING ROOM
- 6 KITCHEN
- 7 BEDROOM
- 8 COURTYARD

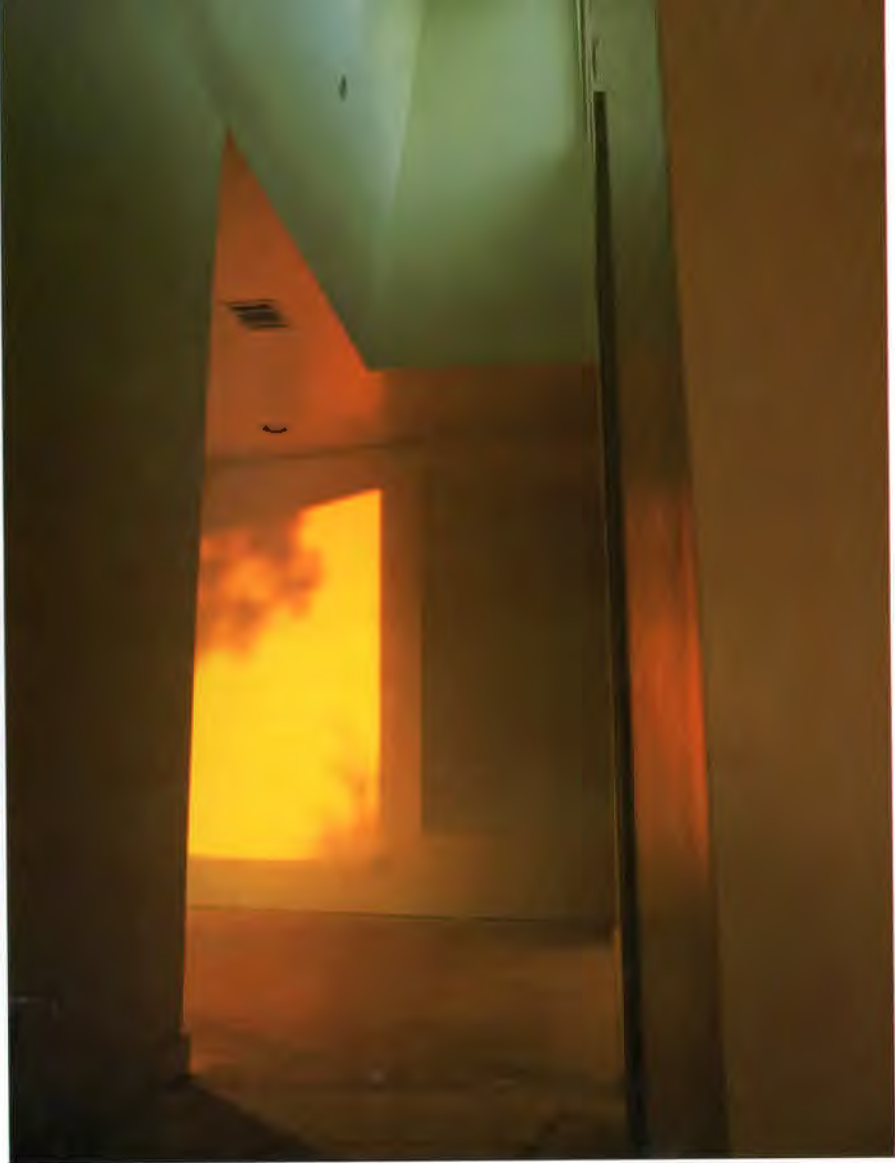
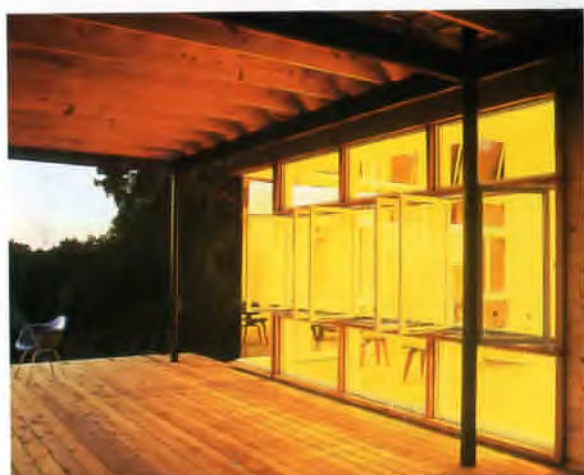


1 view west from the living room toward the river

2 looking through the courtyard toward the screened porch and library tower

3 The 96-foot-long porch connects and shades the buildings and spaces behind.

4 series of sections looking west and moving from the juniper forest to the cliff edge



PROJECT Tonnesen House, West of Austin

CLIENT Edie and Alan Tonnesen

ARCHITECT Kevin Alter and David Heymann Architects, Austin

CONTRACTOR Greg Kahn
CONSULTANTS Jerry Garcia, P.E. (structural)

PHOTOGRAPHER Kevin Alter, David Heymann, and Brian Lemond

RESOURCES

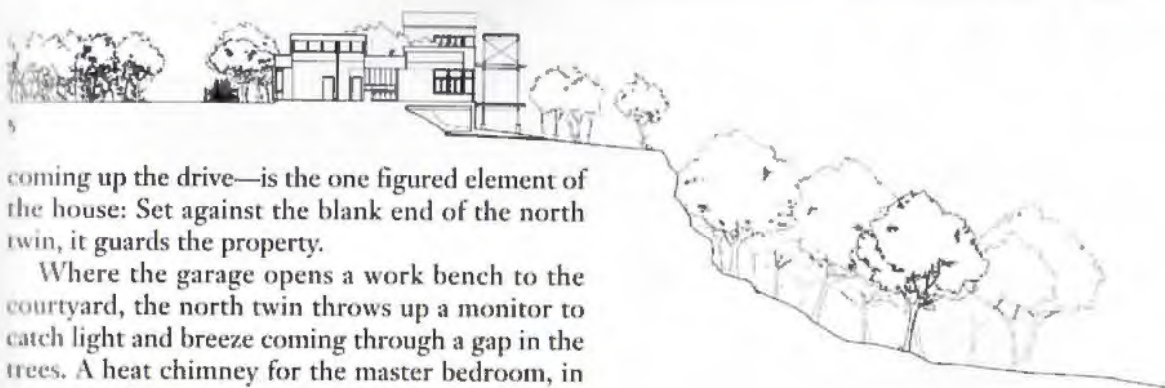
Windows: Kolbe & Kolbe;
doors: Wenco; **paint and stain:** Flood; **hardware:** Schlage; **appliances:** General Electric; **plumbing fittings:** Grohe; **flush valves:** Kohler; **heating system:** Trane; **pre-wire smart system:** Mesa Home Systems

steeply—it cannot support topsoil—to a cliff's edge. Below the cliff are lush riparian woods in the unbuildable flood plain of the river. Sited at a bend in the river, extraordinary views are afforded to the brutal west. The prevailing south-southeast breeze accelerates along the cliff edge, between the trees, and along the strip of exposed ground.

The clients have frequently camped in the woods below and the mottes above the cliff. Their basic love of the site is inhabitational rather than proprietary, and the house seeks to capitalize on the possibilities it offers. A large porch—it is 96 feet long and 16 feet wide—hovers over the exposed sloping ground above the cliff. It extends the shade and the ground level of the oak grove out into the breezes, affording views of the river and woods, linking these two habitable landscapes. The large porch is the great room of the house. Some portion of it is almost always in shade or sun, and it always draws a breeze. It is at once ludicrous, but also ludicrously common-sensible, like a cap with an enormous brim: Its habitability allowed for substantial reductions in the enclosed programs of the house.

Two unprepossessing buildings sidle up to the porch through gaps in the oak grove. Initially understood as twins, each has developed in accord with site and program. The north twin holds the enclosed portions of the house (living and dining room, kitchen, study, bedroom, baths, storage). The south twin holds a sequence of porous programs (garage, breezeway, and screen porch, with a library/second bedroom above) that control the microclimate of the courtyard between. Beginning at grade level, the floor remains constant as the ground drops away. Both buildings are slab-on-grade until they leave the grove, which gives way to a suspended floor (coinciding with a large public room in each building) and then to the large porch hovering above the ground.

The two buildings develop a sequence of relationships in cross section as you move into the site. The north twin angles to avoid a stand of oaks (and flares to the west to offer a view of the river's bend from the master bedroom); in so doing, it introduces the courtyard. The bulldog window on this wall—from the master bed, you can see anyone



coming up the drive—is the one figured element of the house: Set against the blank end of the north twin, it guards the property.

Where the garage opens a work bench to the courtyard, the north twin throws up a monitor to catch light and breeze coming through a gap in the trees. A heat chimney for the master bedroom, in section it bounces light back into the bath and dressing closet. Beyond the garage the south twin opens a breezeway that telescopes to a magnificent mature cedar; the same slot of space, across the courtyard, becomes the entry to the north twin.

The immediately succeeding sectional slot—through the screen porch and living room—also opens to a mature cedar, framed by the windowed north wall of the living room. The public rooms open onto, and are connected by, the large porch. At its western edge you are left, startlingly, floating above the ground and in the everpresent breeze.

The sequential ordering of the site and house is continued in the successive lines of cliff, forest, river, and horizon. This series of sections—it begins with the cedar forest—binds the house and landscape. But the house also offers a counteractive stability in the courtyard, which captures a small stand of oaks (no trees were cut down for the house). The courtyard is not really centralized. Rather, at its edges it introduces and suggests the variety of peripheral spaces (these include, in addition to a breezeway and a large porch, a kitchen deck and garden, and a library porch where you can witness the moonrise), each offering its own type of inhabitable shade.

Arising out of the difference between strong desires and a very modest budget, the client has cho-

sen a strategy of bringing everything up to a common level of incompleteness. Straightforward construction techniques and local trades are capitalized on for the possibilities they hold (the welded steel deck structure, for example, comes from the call for unselfconscious pier construction in the surrounding lakes), and the house is understood as the beginning of a compound that will be finished out in the coming years and eventually include significant landscaping, a pool, and a boat dock.

Here a variety of social occasions are played out in several kinds of shade, breeze, and prospect. Whether enjoying the shade and accelerated wind of the breezeway, taking an afternoon nap in the screen porch, sitting at the edge of the large porch with a cocktail against the dying light of the sunset, or later in the year, warming oneself in the winter sun at the other end of the porch, the buildings enable the clients to embrace their property in ways that are immediate and entirely tangible.

TA

Kevin Alter is an assistant professor of architecture and associate director of the Center for American Architecture and Design at the University of Texas at Austin; David Heymann is an associate professor and associate dean for undergraduate programs at the UT School of Architecture.

1 looking along the deck toward living room; the deck will eventually have a bench rail, a large table, and a movable solar curtain at its southern end

2 The enclosed portions of the house are ordered by framing that allows the placement of either fixed glass or commercially available operable windows.

3 Interior spaces of the north section of the house are filled with sunlight bouncing in from the tower that serves as both heat chimney and light monitor.

4 a panoramic view of the house from the road side shows the relationship of the two buildings and courtyard; the bulldog window can be seen at far right

5 sectional elevation, moving from the juniper forest at left to the cliff's edge just beyond the house and down to the river below

Detailed Connection

by Greg S. Papay and Ted Flato, FAIA

WE FIND THAT THE BEAUTY OF ARCHITECTURE emerges when a structural edifice melds with its place. Place is an elusive combination of qualities visceral and ephemeral. Successful architecture does not sit isolated within its place: It engages its surroundings to reveal the place's essence. In a rural context this translates into a more profound experience of the land, sky, climate, and vistas, and an understanding of a landscape created by something other than man. When we are allowed to build in this kind of environment there is a simple majesty our architecture should honor.

In an urban setting we build in a place defined physically by our predecessors' wonderful, awful, and mundane efforts, and ethereally by a city's spirit, culture, and character. Yet our aspirations remain the same: to create architecture that melds with the best of the physical and reveals the ethereal. Downtown San Antonio is a place with *place*—a richly textured urban architectural fabric and culture unmatched by any other Texas city.

The International Center in downtown San Antonio was a project that involved a complete renovation and rethinking of the city's old main library and the urban space that surrounded it. For the International Center to fit within and contribute to downtown San Antonio we needed to transform a bland, miscast shell into a building of congruence and distinction. For congruence we looked to honor the scale, proportion, and rhythm of its handsome neighbors—the formal order of the adjoining 1920s office buildings and the eclectic, industrial, back-alley character of the River Walk buildings. For distinction, we looked to create a family of details that defined the building's character and in turn allowed the building to reveal some of the character of its place.

The process of developing details is basically the same no matter what the scale of the project, always beginning with the end in mind. What are we asking this material or combination of materials to do: reinforce a larger building order, signify something, create a distinct physical environment, solve a technical problem? Typically, the answer is many or all of these things. Additionally, material choices, renderings, methods of joinery, and other such decisions are driven by context—location, scale, adjoining materials, forms. The three canopies at the International Center provide an effective example of this: Though of a family, they are detailed distinctly relative to context. The north canopy, adjacent to a heavily trafficked bus route, is detailed in a utilitarian manner since it solely gives shade to bus passengers and pedestrians. At the main entry, the east canopy is canted, extended, and lighted to signify the primary path into the building. The west canopy projects the furthest, providing shelter from the west sun, and is the most intricately detailed as the connection to the city's civic center and thus the VIP entry for city dignitaries and their visitors.

The development of these types of details is heavily influenced by our interaction with local craftspeople and members of the building trades. San Antonio is blessed with a rich tradition of building craft descended from Mexican and European sensibilities and Texas ranching practicality. These sensibilities, though rooted in the past, are not all nostalgic: They combine knowledge of traditional methods of building with a frontier attitude that pursues the ways current manufacturing and construction technology can create new modes of expression.



David Lake, FAIA, Javier Huerta, and Greg Papay



David Lake, FAIA, Javier Huerta, and Greg Papay

1 looking up at the International Center from the River Walk

2 New windows echo the classical formality of the adjacent Bank One building.

3 The southeast corner of the building houses the international conference center under a vaulted roof.

4 international conference center interior



David Lake, FAIA, Javier Huerta, and Greg Papay

Frank, frequent interaction with these local artisans expand our ability to detail better relationships, both between parts of the building and between the building and its surroundings. When a detail is drawn and, more importantly, constructed, the influence of the craftsman is always visibly present. The craftspeople with whom we work have had the direct effect of making our constructed details more appropriate to the locally available craft; this sense of appropriateness is one thing that can make the work particular to its place.

Although the International Center represented something of a departure for us in terms of scale and site, the transition was simplified because our work is not about creating a specific "style," but about responding to a particular place and making it work with the environment, about always trying to make the building and land work as a team.

When we are working in the landscape (ranch houses, arboretums, even larger-scaled campus projects) the buildings have a distinctly familiar regional feeling because they are based on a response to the sun, wind, local craft, and land. In an urban context, the International Center being a perfect example, the solution is naturally more subtle. However, the overall approach is much the same. We looked at the existing building, the land, the River Walk on two sides, and some of San Antonio's finest buildings all around it, and tried to pull the two together. Like a ranch



PROJECT *International Center, San Antonio*
CLIENT *City of San Antonio*
ARCHITECT *Lake/Flato Architects, San Antonio (David Lake, FAIA, Ted Flato, FAIA, principals; Greg S. Papay, project architect)*
CONSULTING DESIGN ARCHITECT *Danze + Blood Architects, Austin*
ARCHITECT, INTERIORS *Burton Rose Gonzales, San Antonio (Mary Burton, Grace Rose)*
CONTRACTOR *Stoddard Construction Co.*
CONSULTANTS *Jaster Quintanilla & Associates (structural); HMG & Associates (mechanical, electrical, plumbing); G.G.C. Engineers (civil); The Sage Group, Inc. (landscape production); Everett Fly (consulting landscape design); Archillum Lighting Design, Inc. (lighting); George Cisneros (video wall artist)*
PHOTOGRAPHER *Yvette McClelland and Leigh McLeod, unless noted*



David Lake, FAIA, Javier Huerta, and Greg Papay

1

1 The building's west canopy, with its illuminated copper panels, is the most intricately detailed of the building's three main covered entries.

2 An angled lighting armature in the conference center is composed of sandblasted aluminum beams and purlins infilled by panels of copper screen.

3 A 60-foot-tall atrium introduces natural light into the building's core and reduces the perceived depth of the floor plate.

4 On the River Walk side, balconies and glazed openings provide a connection to the pedestrian zone below.

5 The existing building was an opaque brick box.



2



3

house, we tied the building to the land and blurred the line between River Walk, street, and the interior.

The result is two buildings—an open “river-walk” structure and a contrasting solid brick “street” building—with the River Walk wrapping around on three sides and the original street grid flowing between the two structures. The main room, the international conference center, completes the indoor/outdoor experience by functioning like a huge outdoor room for admiring one of San Antonio’s most beautiful areas. **TA**

Greg S. Papay was the project architect for Lake/Flato Architects of San Antonio on the International Center; Ted Flato, FAIA, is a principal of Lake/Flato Architects.

RESOURCES

Wall surfacing: TEIFS Wall Systems; **windows:** Vista Wall; **doors:** Vista Wall, Oshkosh Architectural Door Co.; **ceiling surfacing/system:** Armstrong; **roofing:** Firestone Building Products Co.; **hardware:** Hager, Schlage, Dorma, Monarch; **security/detection/fire:** Cerberus Pyrotronics; **elevators:** Dover Elevator Co.; **lighting:** Strand Lighting, Halo, Bega, Kurt Versen, Metalux; **plumbing:** Eljer, Delaney Flush Valves, Bradley Corp., Elkay; **heating system:** Trane; **air-conditioning system:** Trane, Liebert; **carpets/rugs:** Prince Street Technologies Ltd.; **blinds:** Castec Window Shade, Inc.

Talking in Place

AN ARCHITECTURE OF PLACE is an architecture of conversation, of listening and response. A *bon mot* is welcome, but the greater part of the architect's role is to keep the discussion flowing. The architects of San Antonio's International Center produced a *bon mot* in the third-floor conference room, with its graceful vault roof and its dramatically cantilevered balcony shading artist George Cisneros' kinetic video wall. In most respects, however, the project participates in the urban conversation by releasing potentialities already there.

The International Center was built on the skeleton of a former library. The site is bounded by two streets (St. Mary's and Market), the River Walk, and a modern flood diversion channel. The easternmost block of Dolorosa Street, the southern boundary of Main Plaza, had been blocked by the library, which terminated the street with a loading dock. The short block of Dolorosa between the library and Main Plaza, the address of San Fernando Cathedral, became a back alley. The River Walk came to a dead end and had minimal landscaping at this location. The redesign sought to heal these wounds.

Along St. Mary's, a landscaped ramp now links Market Street to the River Walk. A pedestrian bridge over the ramp links the International Center's entrance to St. Mary's, and an arcade cut into the façade links the entry to Market. All these linkages communicate visually with one another, providing a variety of overlooks from which to see human movement.

The building was reconceived as two masses divided by an "avenida," a central corridor, on axis with Dolorosa Street. The idea was to visually recall the lost block of Dolorosa. Alas, the "avenida," is much narrower than the street, and tenant finish-out stopped upper-story views through the building, contrary to the wishes of interior architects Burton Rose Gonzales. Dolorosa now ends attractively at a secondary entrance, but the visual continuation of the street was compromised. North of the "avenida," portions of the original brick skin were removed to create quartets of large windows; the new fenestration echoes the classical formality of the adjacent Bank One building. To the south, including the river façade, brick was removed, the frame stuccoed, and openings glazed behind inset balconies, recalling the undressed look of the river's traditional neighbors, the rear ends of buildings that fronted the street. **Mike Greenberg**

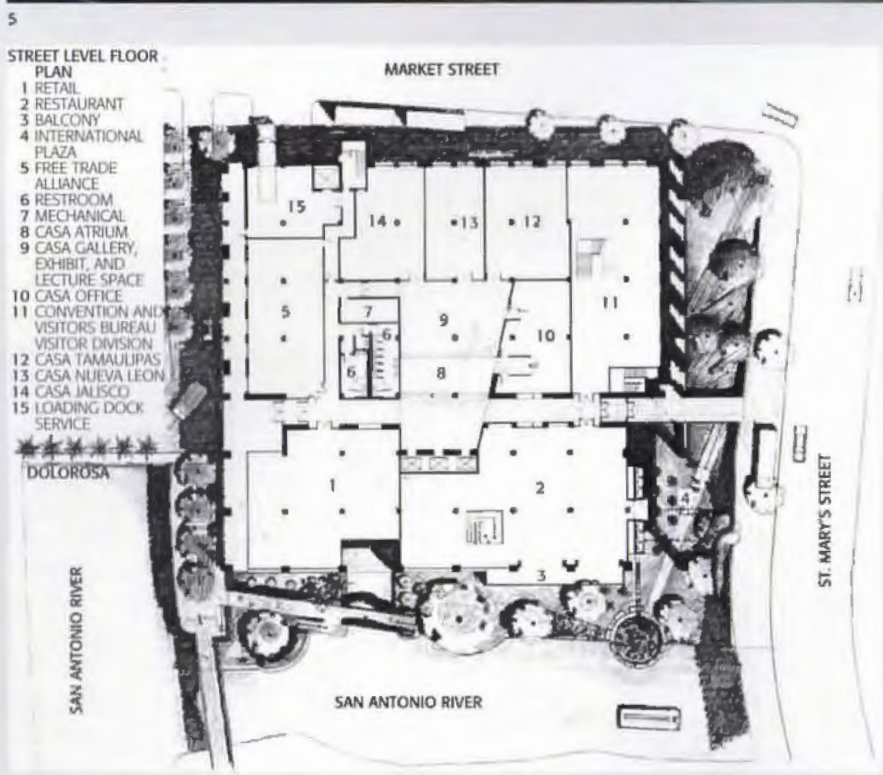
Mike Greenberg is senior critic for the San Antonio Express-News and author of The Poetics of Cities.

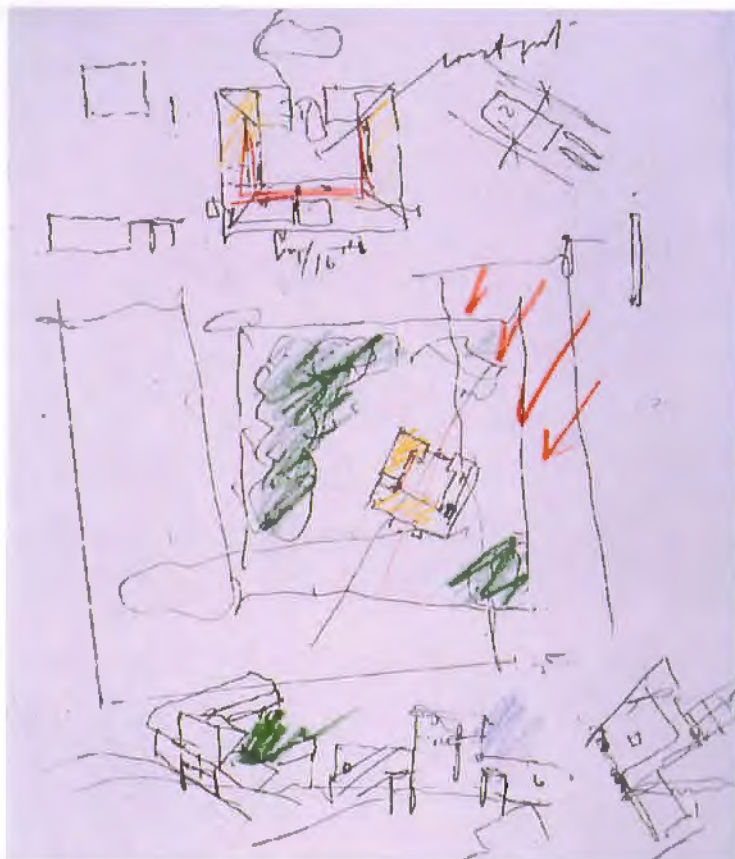


David Lake, FAIA, Javier Huerta, and Greg Papay



David Lake, FAIA, Javier Huerta, and Greg Papay





Unforeseen Vistas

by Carlos Jimenez

PROJECT Wilson House, Brooks County
CLIENT Wallace and Isabel B. Wilson
DESIGNER Carlos Jimenez Studio, Houston (Carlos Jimenez, project designer; John H. Bowley, project architect; Robert Fowler; Eric Batte, Alexander Carroll, project team)
CONTRACTOR Cantu/Cosby Construction Company, Falfurrias
CONSULTANTS Structural Consulting Company, Inc., Houston (structural)
PHOTOGRAPHER Hester + Hardaway Photographers

- 1 An early conceptual sketch shows the enclosed courtyard plan.
- 2 The Wilson House sits on a slight rise in the midst of a sea of mesquite and oak trees.
- 3 The balcony on the south side of the library tower provides expansive views of surrounding ranchland.
- 4 As the plan evolved, the house opened up to its surroundings; at left, a breezeway leads into the central courtyard space and, at right, a two-level screened porch projects from the north façade.

IN THINKING ABOUT THE BUILDING OF PLACE, whether this might be within a specific region of Texas or anywhere in the world, the idea of architecture at its purest springs forth: architecture understood as that singular perception and edification of place already charged with universal intimations. This architecture implies an attitude towards building with what is there, what one finds in or near the site, and within the site's impending circumstances. This fundamental awareness might at times manifest itself through predilection for a particular material, through the endurance of orientation, or through the inexhaustible memory of a detail.

These thoughts come to mind as I recall my first encounter with the site, or rather the multiple sites, considered for the construction of the Wilson House. My initial response to the desolate splendor of this harsh yet beautiful landscape was one of uneasiness, magnified by the difficulty of searching for a suitable location for placing the 4,000-square-foot house. A small helicopter was rented to facilitate the pursuit across the vast and flat wilderness. As one site was considered, we would descend, walk around, inspect the views, consider access, include or dismiss it as a possibility, then up we would go again. After some time of repeating this procedure, we revisited one of the sites seen early on, and through a more careful inspection, arrived at the conclusion that this was the most ideal location.

Surrounded by a horizon of wild mesquites and oaks sprinkled with native cacti, the site offered commanding views and refreshing breezes from the south. Its proximity to a group of large oak trees to the west anticipated shading from the implacable afternoon sun. The site's only drawback was

its top soil—an unstable and sandy layer—that was eventually stabilized by compacting a large bed of caliche (a local hard yet malleable soil extracted from a well near the property) over the entire building area.

The initial design began as a semi-enclosed courtyard structure, a U-shaped layout consisting of three separate one-story wings joined by a continuous roof and a connecting porch. The layout stressed the need to protect the private and public activities of what is primarily a retreat for a Houston family and its guests. This strong desire for protection emanated from the house's vulnerable exposure to extreme weather and the vigilant population of scorpions, rattlesnakes, and coyotes that live within close proximity of the house grounds. The principal materials selected (concrete block, stucco, galvanized steel, and cedar and mesquite woods) underscore the need for durable and resistant materials, one of the indispensable strategies for surviving the inclement environment.

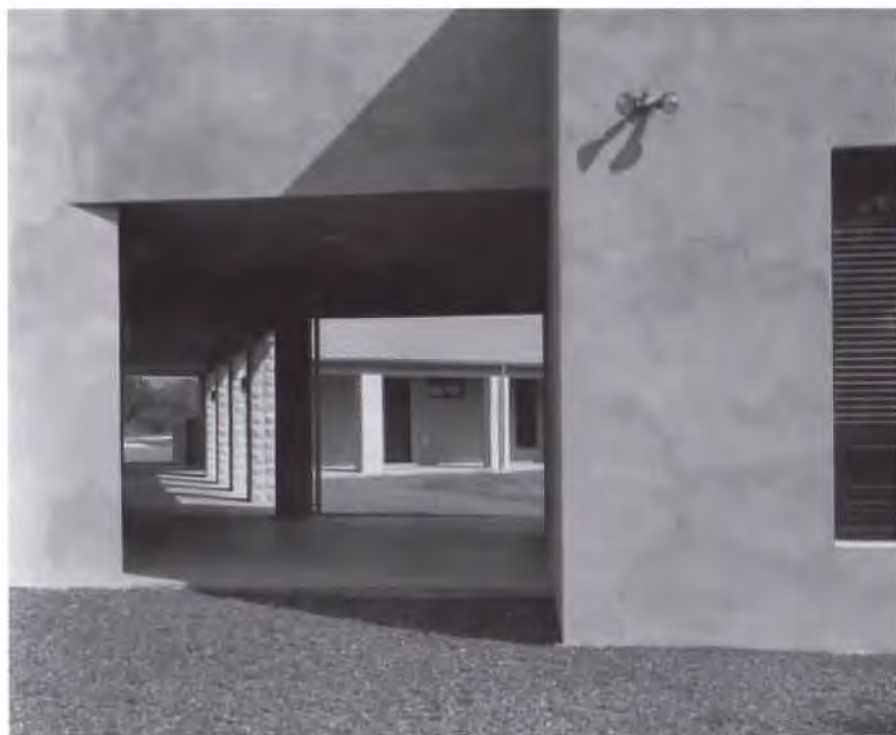
As the design developed and I was able to spend more time at the site, unforeseen vistas



3



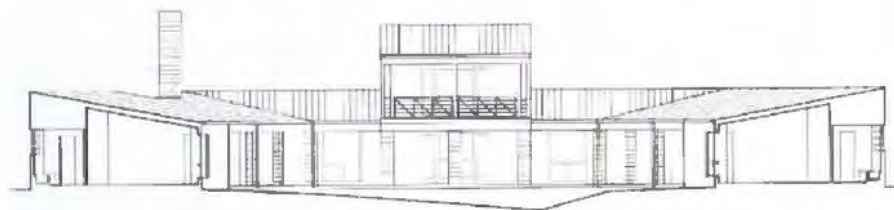
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and opportunities were revealed, while my beginning apprehensions toward the inclement environment eased their strong hold. During a process of four months these realizations were integrated into the design and the house began to open up its fortification-like enclosure to embrace the landscape. A library tower with north and south porches was added to provide opportunities for panoramic views. A low camouflaged fence, one third of its mesh in the ground, was planted all around the immediate vicinity of the house (to keep the more aggressive animals away) without impeding any view from the interior spaces.

Soon after the house was finished, the Wilsons gave a wonderful party animated by a local band for all the construction workers and their families. Later that evening, I lingered in the library's south porch to witness an unfolding storm. The mesquite trees would take on iridescent silhouettes each time lightning split the turbulent sky. Soon after this phenomenon, the metal roof on either side of the porch would turn into a tight silver net held by the upper branches of the taller trees as the ground below would disappear into the thick night. I suddenly recalled the happy music of the evening and felt privileged to experience another of the many architectures that the house would inscribe, each time anew, with the passing of time. **TA**

Carlos Jimenez is the principal of Carlos Jimenez Studio of Houston.

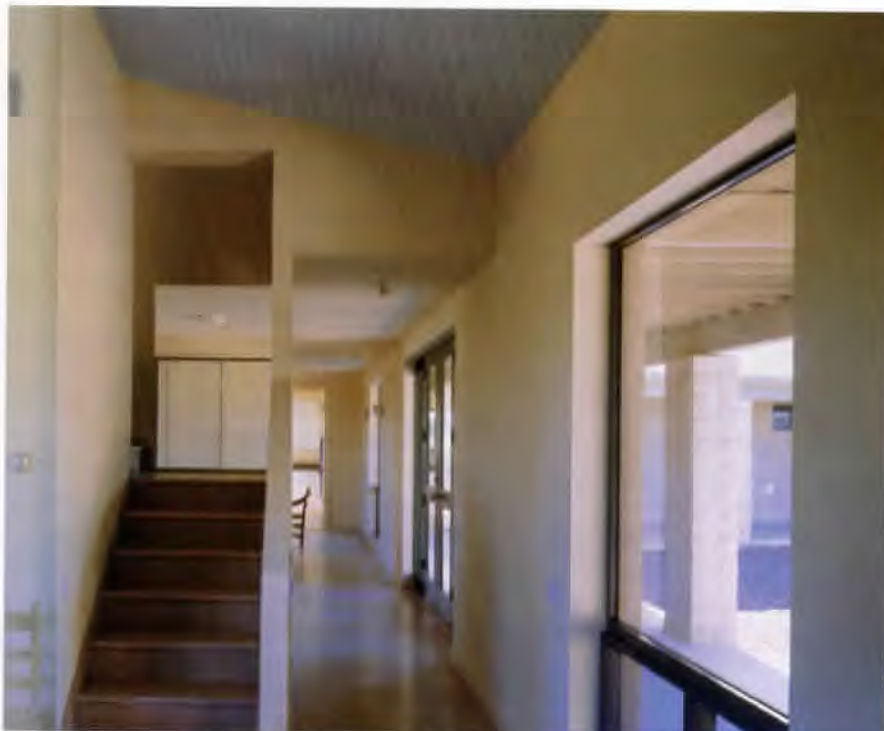
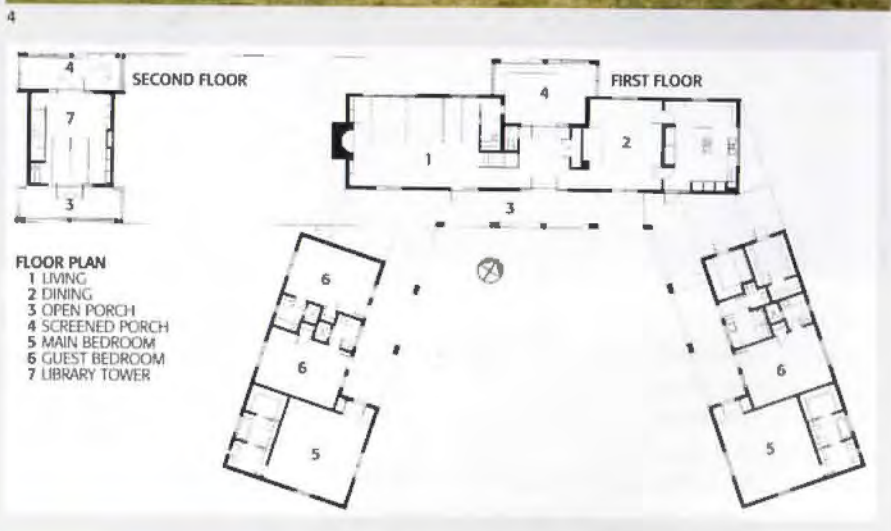
Opening Up

THE WILSON HOUSE is located in Brooks County on a privately owned ranch comprising a few hundred acres. The Isabella Ranch is about a 45-minute drive from Falfurrias, the nearest town. The house is used primarily for weekend getaways and hunting excursions (quail and wild turkey are the principal game). The clients are a Houston couple whose passion is to entertain family and friends amid the natural splendor of their ranch grounds.

The enclosed portion of the house is 4,000 square feet, with an additional 1,600 square feet of open and screened porches. The program consists of three individual wings, separate from one another and linked by a linear porch overlooking a fan-shaped courtyard. The southwest and southeast wings contain guest bedrooms; the southwest wing also houses a laundry area and storage closets. The central section is occupied by an ample living area on one side and a dining and kitchen area on the other side. A library tower occupies the central space of this section, giving the house its only two-story space, a singular vantage point from which to take in all possible views of the wild surroundings.

Designed to take advantage of the south breezes, the house opens up towards this orientation, which also provides some of the most compelling vistas across the endless rolling flatness.

CJ



1 looking through the breezeway on the west façade toward the interior courtyard space

2 Tough materials like concrete block, stucco, and galvanized steel were chosen for their resistance to the harsh conditions.

3 south elevation and cross sections

4 The two arms of the house now open the courtyard to include the landscape.

5 The spareness of the exteriors is carried over in the light-filled interiors.

RESOURCES

Wood frame: Boise Cascade; **concrete block and limestone split block:** Featherlite; **exterior/standing-seam metal roof:** Berridge Co.; **stucco:** Portland Cement Products; **gypsum board:** American Gypsum; **windows:** Kawneer; **doors:** Lonestar Door Co.; **composition tile:** Kentile; **ceramic tile:** Walker Zanger; **waterproofing/sealants:** Dow Corning; **paint/stain:** Pratt & Lambert, Sherwin Williams; **hardware:** Schlage; **kitchen and laundry equipment:** Sub Zero, KitchenAid, Dacon, Maytag; **incandescent lighting:** Lightolier; **exterior floodlights:** Hubbell; **ceiling fans:** Hunter; **plumbing:** American Standard, Chicago Faucets, Speakman; **central air and heat:** Lennox



1

RESOURCES

Suspended-slab foundation: L&M Steel; **pre-fabricated roof trusses:** TimberTech; **windows:** Pella Corp.; **stucco:** Arahed Lathing Corp.; **ceramic tile:** American Olean; **gypsum wallboard:** Gold Bond Building Products; **doors:** Pella Products, Weyerhaeuser, Simpson Door Co., Southwood, Ceco Door Products; **stained concrete:** L.M. Scofield; **cement tile:** Mission Tile; **acoustic panel ceiling system:** Armstrong Contract Interiors; **built-up asphalt roof:** Schuller Roofing Systems; **waterproofing/sealants:** Sonneborn-Chemflex, Inc.; **insulation:** Owens Corning & Monville; **paint/stain:** ICI Paint (Devco & Reynolds, Inc.); **weatherstripping:** NGP; **security/detection (conference/dining):** Cerberus Pyrotronics; **lighting:** Kurt Versen, SPI, Metalux, Peerless; **exit signs:** Cooper Lighting; **plumbing:** Universal Rundle, American Standard; **toilet stalls:** Ampco Products, Inc.; **air-conditioning system:** Carrier; **environmental control systems:** Landis & Gyr Powers, Inc.; **carpets/rugs:** Prince Street, Masland; **custom millwork:** The Hoffman Company; **black-out shade:** Mecho Shade Systems, Inc.



2

A Place Apart

by Davis Sprinkle

EACH OF US ATTEMPTS IN OUR BUILDINGS to create a microcosm of the world. In doing so, we mix language, modify history, and create new realities. More often than not our building's success lies not in its structural bravado or its clever parti, but instead in its resonance in our collective understanding of space and time. With the Oblate Renewal Center, the question for us was: How do you express in architecture the Oblate Father's mission of helping the poor while at the same time attempting to lift our spirits?

The renewal center is nestled amongst trees planted by the Oblates on their 41-acre campus in San Antonio some 75 years ago. Live oaks, pecans, mesquite, and mountain laurel make the campus an oasis from the surrounding urban context. What was called for here was an architecture that possesses a certain anonymity in terms of a dialogue with its place. Signature architecture and attempts to be modern in a setting like this would only distract. For this project we were looking to create a place that is *in* but not *of* this world—connected to its surroundings at an intuitive level, that is, but not necessarily an explicit one.

Living and working in San Antonio, we are constantly reminded of and drawn back to the Spanish missions that dot the San Antonio River as it winds south of our city. The Oblates' history as missionaries among the Hispanic peoples of South Texas also influenced our decision to use those indigenous mission forms as a starting point for the design. In various ways, the renewal center suggests a connection to aspects of this architecture: the warm-colored stucco surfaces against the harsh south Texas sun, massing that alludes to a simpler program and plan, and outdoor spaces carved around massive trees and existing topographic features.

The site was the southwestern quadrant of the Oblates' campus that, when first established in the 1920s, was far north of the outer limits of civilization but is now thoroughly surrounded by the noise and bustle of a well-established suburban community inside Loop 410. The users of the renewal center are for the most part lay persons who come for various kinds of retreats and stay for a period of three to six days. The center's primary retreat is for couples who are engaged to be married. Issues such as intimacy, trust, and the power of love were discussed by the Fathers



Paul Bardagy

before we began design. When the concept of the "rings of intimacy" was mentioned as a teaching tool for the engagement retreat, it struck a chord in us. The plan of the renewal center expresses this concept with its semicircular configuration that focuses on the St. Joseph's Chapel. Five residential buildings with delicate ornaments of iron balconies and perforated metal light fixtures present identical faces to the cloistered garden. The gently curving colonnade encourages contemplative strolls through the rhythmic alterations between the lighter shade and cooling breezes of the open arcades and the deep shade and stillness of the residential building porches. At the top of the site, the colonnade terminates at the conference/dining center, which in turn opens out to a large plaza.

For us, this project was an exercise in restraint. When we visit the renewal center and see people walking the grounds in silence, we are reminded that our primary purpose is not just to create buildings but to create an architecture that is connected to its larger place, while at the same time making a place of its own. **TA**

Davis Sprinkle is a principal of Sprinkle Robey Architects of San Antonio.

- 1 Materials and forms suggest a connection to San Antonio's historic missions.
- 2 A sweeping colonnade connects the buildings.
- 3 The renewal center encloses a peaceful garden space.



FLOOR PLAN
 1 CONFERENCE/DINING
 2 OVERNIGHT STAY
 3 CHAPEL
 4 PRIEST RESIDENCE
 5 PLAZA
 6 GROTTO CHAPEL
 7 MEMORIAL CHAPEL

PROJECT Oblate Renewal Center, San Antonio
CLIENT Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate of Texas
ARCHITECT Sprinkle Robey Architects, San Antonio (Davis Sprinkle, Thom Robey, principals; Chris Schultz, project architect; Dwayne Bobuslav, Amy McClelland, Steve Smisek, project team)
CONTRACTOR Guido Brothers Construction Co.
CONSULTANTS Simpson Group (civil and structural); Hobza Wallis Group (mechanical, electrical, plumbing); Morris Dudley (landscape architect)
PHOTOGRAPHER Lars Hundere, unless noted



1



2

Plain Presence

by Kevin Sloan and Max Levy



3

Kevin Sloan

ONE THIRD OF TEXAS is overswept by the southern Great Plains. Yet, despite this giant presence, we have edited the plains from our consciousness and have ignored them in architectural terms. Viewed objectively, when unmolested by human clumsiness, the plains can be compellingly beautiful. In the 1850s Frederick Law Olmsted pronounced the Texas plains among the most beautiful landscapes he had ever seen. Reassured by today's lifelines of transportation and communication, our imaginations might at last consider the pleasures of the plains. But at this late hour of the 20th century, a planning pattern that can truly appreciate and perpetuate the splendors of the plains still eludes us. We hope that a project recently undertaken north of Dallas/Fort Worth may offer some answers. Big Sky, Texas, is a new community designed to preserve and actually enjoy its prairie setting.

Planning

PRIOR TO THE 20TH CENTURY, the plains were settled with town-planning strategies that created a working sense of civitas and made distinctions between city and prairie legible. Since World War II, the suburban model of "sprawl" or "growth" has taken over, failing to produce city, country, or community in the end. When we started considering Big Sky, we posed this question to ourselves: What would a planning pattern look like that would allow one to inhabit the prairie without eradicating the very qualities that arouse one's desire to be there?

When the settlers crossed the plains, many wrote in their journals that they were "out of sight of land," so compelling was the experience of the land-ocean they were crossing. In many ways, the 1,000 contiguous acres of Big Sky is a small inland ocean of prairie situated at the crown of a large topographic rise. The views are dramatically emotive, reminiscent of the settlers' experience.

Rather than the standard approach of making "ranchettes" or "subdivisions" and thus consuming the prairie, we have proposed an alternative strategy. Drawing from the orthogonal county road system, a simple and uncelebrated infrastructure of gravel roads has been laid out to surround a 680-acre prairie preserve. This area will be unbuilt upon for perpetuity, with portions being



4

all photographs by Max Levy, unless noted



5

restored to natural prairie, portions planted in wheat and sunflowers, and portions grazed by cattle. Not only does this stewardship visually maintain the prairie, but revenues from the agricultural uses offset the preserve's property taxes. Hiking and equestrian trails course through the preserve, culminating at a stable that will serve as a public building for the whole community.

One- to two-acre homesites are single-loaded along the roads, each structure tethered like a vessel out on a large body of water. These homesites are separated by 50-foot-wide fingers of prairie, insuring that recreational and agricultural uses flow uninterrupted across the site.

For those who are drawn to the prairie but prefer a more urban domain, 80 acres has been set aside for the future development of a town. A town square will be positioned so as to overlook the preserve, instead of being positioned at the town's center. Like the Piazza San Marco in Venice, Italy, whose fourth side is completed by the Grand Canal, the fourth side of the town will be completed by the land-ocean of the plains. In this way, those who live in town are spatially related to the landscape, while the open side of the town beckons to those who view it from across the preserve.

Architecture

STANDING ON A TEXAS PLAIN, if you look straight up overhead, the sky is blue. But as you bring your gaze down to the horizon, the sky pales to a hazy gray. This lower region of sky is the backdrop against which all plains buildings are starkly revealed. It is no wonder, then, that the buildings most at ease in this landscape are the scattered barns, sheathed in unpainted corrugated galvanized sheet metal, a material that visually merges with this horizon sky. By almost disappearing, these buildings emphasize the essential character of their setting: a landscape that simply wants to run unimpeded. Here, one wrong roof line, a jarring color, or even a building cocked at a funny angle is enough to disrupt literally a mile of open panorama.

Having observed that gray sheet metal is among the materials most sympathetic to the plains, and having realized that treading lightly harmonizes with this place, additional design clues arise from the land itself.

Color. For some reason most man-made colors set in this landscape, viewed from a distance, resemble litter or a junkyard. Surprisingly, white alone appears serene year round. Apparently we make a connection between white and cloud. Clouds hover prominently here, their eloquence underlined by prairie sparseness. Buildings that bring touches of white into play reduce their



6

own gravity, and the plains seem more lightly touched.

Form. Out here, complicated building forms seem awkwardly self-conscious, and the sweep of one's gaze gets tangled up on them. Simple forms rhyme with this simple landscape, and in so doing they visibly honor the land's graceful passage.

Position. Patterns of tillage run parallel to fence lines, and buildings tending this enterprise always follow suit, loosely composing themselves at right angles. Though far-flung, these buildings in orthogonal unison seem to tame the prairie's limitlessness, an effect that is satisfying even from the jetliner window at 20,000 feet. Man-made angles impelled by natural landscape features harmonize with this pattern, but an arbitrary angle quickly strikes a sour note.

Plan. Agrarian buildings appeal to most of us because they seem willing to accommodate almost any use our imaginations give to them. Largely free of partitions and pure of form, they are a continuation in floor-plan terms of the plains itself. With electronic media absorbing more and more functions and objects from our daily routines, perhaps an unusually uncluttered "plains floor plan" becomes more possible, clearing the way for the grace of the plains to move through our lives.

All of these observations have been gathered into a design code for the Big Sky project. It is hoped that this design approach will reframe the plains, celebrate reality, be a sort of homecoming. **TA**

Kevin Sloan, a planner and landscape architect with the Hillier Group in Dallas, and Dallas architect Max Levy are the designers of Big Sky, Texas.

1, 2, 5, 6 views of the Big Sky site show the diversity of the prairie; all four views were taken on the same day

house sites surrounding it; the town site is at the southern edge

3 aerial perspective of the Big Sky master plan, showing the large section of untouched prairie at the center, with

4 Existing galvanized metal farm buildings, with their low-slung profiles, blend with the silver-gray sky at the horizon line.

Industry News: Landscaping and Outdoor Products



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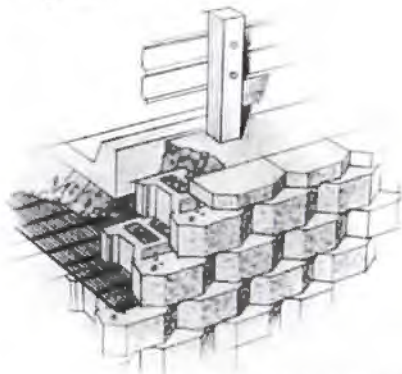


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Molcast introduces a new product: Pedestrian-Level ContraCline, an outdoor luminaire featuring an optical system specifically designed to provide low-glare illumination of roadway, pathway, and area applications from 10- to 16-foot mounting heights. The innovative tiered reflector system is housed in a traditional "acorn" globe reminiscent of turn-of-the-century gas lanterns.



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Survey

Highrise in the Right Place 46

ARCHITECTURE The American General Building, built in Houston in 1965, might provide an example of ways to adapt highrises to a hot environment.

Roman City House 47

ARCHITECTURE The David House in Houston by Charles Tapley is a 30-year-old demonstration of one way an urban residence can address the Texas climate.

Aalto at 100 48

BOOKS Gerald Moorhead, FAIA, reviews a one-volume survey of the works of Alvar Aalto.

New Ways to Draw 49

EDUCATION The University of Texas School of Architecture's Studio Mexico program spent the spring 1998 semester documenting the Mayan ruins at Palenque.

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Bell-like Presence 56

JOURNEY The dance halls of Central Texas, built between 1890 and 1940, display a number of unique architectural qualities.

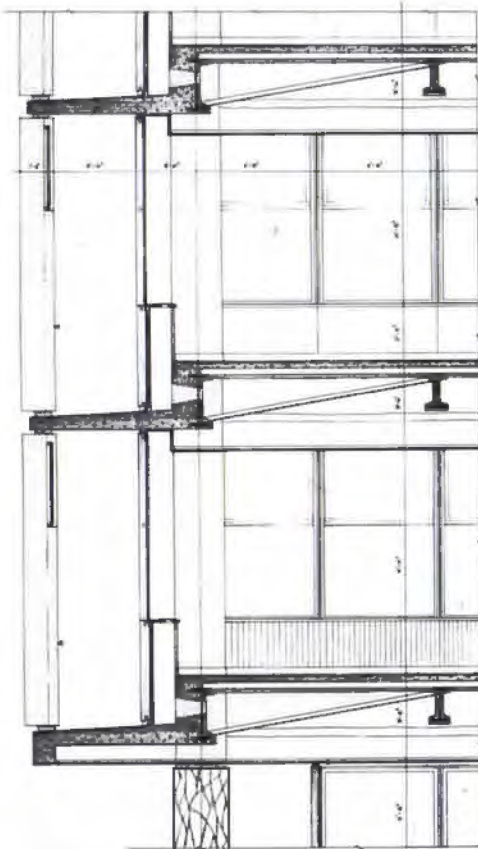
Highrise in the Right Place

ARCHITECTURE The technology of tall buildings, including elevators, wind- and earthquake-resistant structures, curtainwall glazing, and HVAC systems, combined with international architectural practices specializing in their design, has made the skyscraper the ultimate universal building type. Hermetically sealed from the surrounding climate and projecting high above the site context, highrises are exercises in form and symbol.

Although image has always been the main reason tall buildings are built, they weren't always as isolated from their immediate environment. The American General Building, designed by Lloyd Morgan & Jones of Houston and built in 1965 overlooking Buffalo Bayou, is a beautiful example of a highrise with a local character.

The 25-story tower responds to Houston's sun and heat with several passive measures. Architect Arthur Jones, FAIA, sited the rectangular plan oriented east-west, minimizing the afternoon western exposure, the hottest time of day. The glass window wall is shaded by five-foot overhangs projecting at ceiling height and by gray glass panels hung between the outer vertical fins. It is these thin precast concrete verticals, combined with the thin edges of the overhangs, that gives American General its lacy feel. Built before advances in solar glass, the windows of American General are glazed with clear glass, all the more reason to provide substantial shading.

As Louis Sullivan told us, a tall building is like a column, and must have a base, a shaft, and a top. Jones provided a strong horizontal plinth floating over the rolling site (and concealing the park-



Alexander Georges



Richard Payne, FAIA

1 typical exterior wall section detail of the 1960s American General Building in Houston; suncreening was provided by glass panels hung between outer vertical fins

2 The American General Building was built before the advent of technologies that have rendered most urban highrises indistinguishable in terms of their connection to their environment.

3 Placement of the building on the rolling site allowed the parking garage to be hidden.

ing garage), above which rises the delicate tower. Another firm horizontal line, revealed above the tower zone by a deeply inset penthouse, terminates the composition. The perforations of the projecting roof, seen against the bright Gulf Coast sky, have been likened to a string of pearls.

With the advent of reflective glass and cheap energy for more air-conditioning, the years since the construction of American General have seen less incentive to design for a physical accommodation to the local climate. Skylines have filled with tight glass forms that could be (and usually were) placed anywhere on the globe. Perhaps now with high energy and construction prices we should look to an example like American General—still occupied by its original tenant—for a more local and less universal approach to highrise design.

Gerald Moorhead, FAIA

Houston architect Gerald Moorhead, FAIA, is a TA contributing editor.



Gerald Moorhead, FAIA

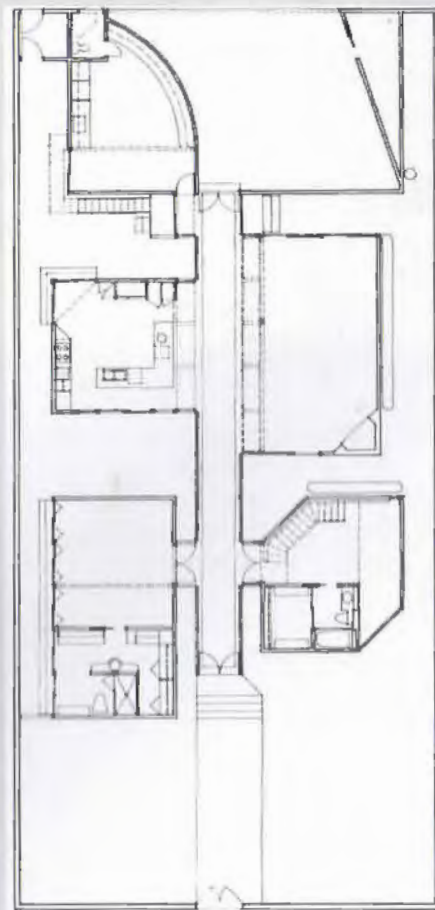
Interior spaces of the David House open to surrounding garden courts.

the Mediterranean, Mexico, and South America. Focused around an open interior court with a blank wall to the street, the Roman model is intended for dense urban use.

Although inner-city Houston could barely be called urban, its standard 50-foot-by-100-foot lots are small and promote

a modest density. These lots could be more effectively utilized with the zero-lot-line atrium model rather than the commonly used freestanding plantation model.

The David House by Charles Tapley Associates, built in 1970 in the Southampton neighborhood near Rice University, is concealed be-



Roman City House

ARCHITECTURE When considering an appropriate prototype for a house in a hot climate like Houston's, a verandaed model like Oak Alley plantation, a Charleston singles house, or a Caribbean cottage may first come to mind. Another option would be the Roman atrium house, found in the hot lands around

"Roman City House" continued on page 48

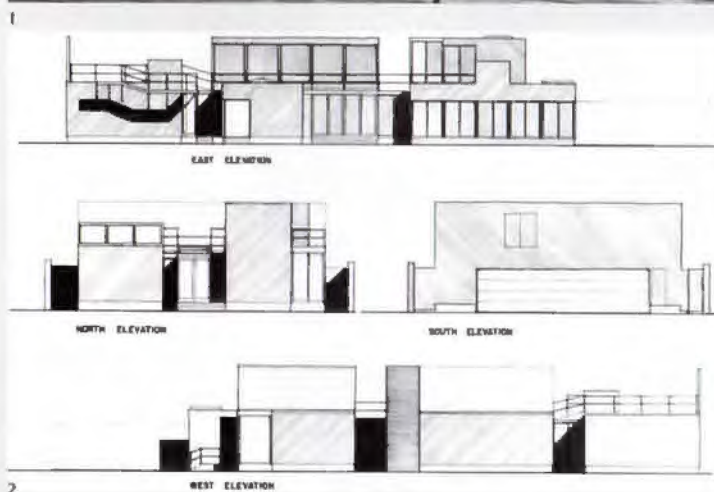
"Roman City House," continued from page 47

hind a high brick wall and heavy wooden gates. Conceptually a sequence of pavilions along each side of a central spine, the plan turns the atrium model inside out within its protective walls. With each of the house's functions contained within a separate volume, small garden courts remain between, pieces of a fragmented atrium scattered around the house. A Roman house would frequently have a larger garden behind the house and the David House has a parallel here too. The flat roof of the spine and the garage creates a large deck, breezier and cooler than ground level and shaded by trees extending up from the courts, with occasional views of the downtown skyline.

None of the openings of the north-south-oriented house face west and, with plenty of large sliding doors off the courts, the essentially one-room-deep house has good cross ventilation. Like an atrium house, the David House has a soft interior light. Filtered by the trees and reflected indirectly, the house "dances with light," according to Tapley, who likens the diagram of the plan to a branch with leaves. Whether viewed as an inside-out atrium or a branch, the David House is a calm, urbane retreat amidst the looming, styleless, blow-dry stucco husks that now fill the neighborhood. **GM**



Cerald Moorhead, FAIA



1 The long roof deck of the David House provides an outdoor space that is open to cooling breezes as well as to views of the downtown Houston skyline.

2 top, east elevation; center left, north elevation; center right, south elevation; bottom, west elevation

Aalto at 100

Alvar Aalto

by Richard Weston

Phaidon Press Ltd. (London, 1995)

240 pages, \$39.95

BOOKS This year is the 100th anniversary of the birth of Alvar Aalto, who was born on February 3, 1898, in the central Finnish town of Kuortane. The web site of the Alvar Aalto Centenary (www.jkl.fi/aalto) itemizes dozens of exhibitions, tours, seminars, publications, and performances that propose both to review and renew the master's mystique. Special bronze plaques will be mounted on Aalto's buildings in Helsinki and Seinäjoki; the restoration of the Viipuri Library is underway; and all of Aalto's built works are being documented and surveyed for preservation needs. A commemorative coin has been minted by the Finnish treasury, two television documentaries have been filmed, and specially bottled red and white Tuscan wines



Cerald Moorhead, FAIA

Sanatorium (1928–33), Paimio, Finland

memorialize this life-loving architect.

Although published several years before this deluge, the book at hand is complimentary to

this year of retrospection and does not compete with the "official" publication connected with the major exhibition mounted in New York (*Alvar Aalto: Between Humanism and Materialism*, edited by Peter Reed, MoMA, 1998). No single book can be as comprehensive as the four-volume *oeuvre complet* written over the last decade by Aalto's friend Goran Schildt, but Weston has prepared a viable one-volume survey.

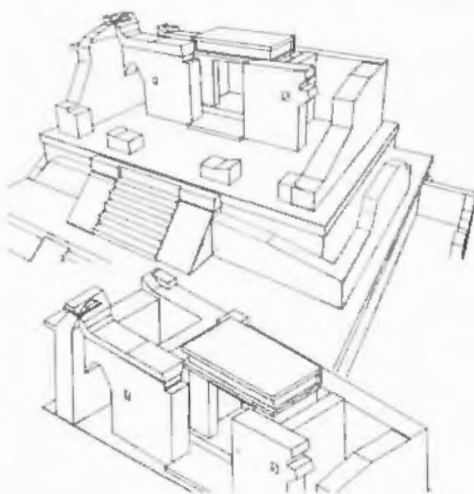
Beginning with a cultural and historical background of Finland, the author examines the young Aalto's development through stages of classicism and functionalism. At this point, the mature works are evaluated in groups according to building types. Foregoing a chronological progression, Weston avoids potential tedium and is able to compare and analyze similar projects throughout Aalto's career. The book is filled with fresh photographs, floor plans, and sketches, and the thematic sections may be read in any order: a good book for browsing and refreshing the memory of all these works we know so well. **GM**

New Ways to Draw

EDUCATION Students in the University of Texas at Austin (UT) School of Architecture's Studio Mexico program spent the spring 1998 semester documenting ruins at the Mayan site of Palenque in Chiapas, Mexico. UT's spring program traditionally involves travel in Mexico and documentation of historic haciendas and urban plazas, but this was the program's first involvement in an active archaeological site. The resulting drawings will be used by archaeologists to plan future digs and to document their findings.

UT's program takes advantage of the school's proximity to Mexico and the faculty's familiarity with the country to introduce students to Mexican culture and architecture. Three major components make up Studio Mexico: architectural history, visual communications, and design. Students spend the first three weeks of the semester familiarizing themselves with the architectural history of Mexico as well as conducting drawing exercises in preparation for travel. During the following five weeks in Mexico, students keep a visual travel journal composed of quick sketches, photographs, and videos. Once back in Austin, the program focuses on a design problem sited at a location the students visited in their travels. For the end of the semester, students produce a research paper on a building in Mexico they visited, the visual travel journal, and the completed design project.

In 1998, the program traveled to Palenque. Situated at the eastern edge of the Rio Usumacinta Basin in the foothills of the Sierra Oriental de Chiapas at an elevation of slightly



less than 3,000 meters, Palenque looks out on a low coastal plain extending to the Gulf of Mexico about 130 kilometers to the north. Although the earliest occupation of the site dates to about 100 B.C., it became a major population center about 600 A.D. and all construction at the site ceased by about 800 A.D.

Work by the UT students focused around Temple XIV and Temple XVII, part of the Group of the Cross. Students measured previously undocumented structures in order to make detailed drawings of them. New to Studio Mexico this year was the extensive use of CAD. Students created computer models of the measured ruins and found that the level of detail possible with the computer often conflicted with the measurements possible. Students often had to assume straight lines and perpendicular walls. Even so, the drawings, though volumetric and stylized, are surprisingly realistic indica-

tions of current conditions. Students also produced the first topographic map of this part of the Palenque site.

Studio Mexico presented its results this past May to a group of architects, scholars, and archaeologists in Austin. UT professors Logan Wagner and Sinclair Black, FAIA, introduced the program and projects, while archaeologists Alfonso Morales and Chris Powell—an alumnus of Studio Mexico and self-described “architectural archaeologist”—gave the historical and archaeological background to the work. The archaeologists were “really happy to see the topographic map,” says Powell. He also added that the three-dimensional drawings will allow them to “cut a section in any direction and get credible drawings from which to work.” Topographic maps and sections are especially important in suggesting hidden extensions of ruins, says Wagner.

However, the most exciting thing to come out of the student work is the three-dimensional modeling. “This is something we’ve never seen before,” says Powell. The attending archaeologists and scholars enjoyed seeing the different views of structures, views that are often impossible in the field due to foliage or structure. Plans are in the works for a virtual reality Palenque site and a series of volumes on the architecture of Palenque, says Powell.

Jonatban Hagood

Jonatban Hagood is a student at the University of Texas School of Architecture and a frequent contributor to Texas Architect.

Coming next issue . . .

The September/October issue of *Texas Architect* will feature the winners of the Texas Society of Architects 44th Annual Design Awards Competition.

Jurors Michael Palladino of Los Angeles, Julie Snow of Minneapolis, and Cal Lewis, FAIA, of Des Moines met in Austin for a weekend in early

June to select the winning projects from among 175 entries.

The projects will be presented along with comments from the jurors and other information about the competition.

And remember that the September/October issue is published in

conjunction with TSA's 59th Annual Meeting and Design Products and Ideas Exposition. This year's annual meeting will be held in Austin October 1-3. We hope that you are planning to be there.

Look for the special TSA Design Awards issue in your mailbox or at the newsstand in September.

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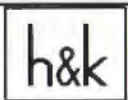
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Bell-like Presence

JOURNEY In Central Texas, between about 1890 and 1940, rural communities were anchored by their church, school, and community hall. These halls were built by benevolent societies—the German SPJST, the Czech KJT, by churches, and by a variety of societies and clubs for shooting, singing, sports, and agriculture.



1



2



3



4

They were also built by volunteer fire departments and by communities themselves. Shares and memberships might be passed down within families and the actual construction of the buildings was often by local volunteers.

Community halls are found all over the country; however, some specific qualities distinguish the halls of Central Texas, architecturally, from halls in other regions. These qualities are rooted in climate and culture. The typical hall has a roof volume that far exceeds the usable volume of the main floor and is vented along the ridge, or at the peak, by a louvered lantern. These two main heat-dispersing qualities of the roof give the halls their sense of light and space and their bell-like presence in the landscape. The wall openings are controlled by shutters that act as shading when open and security when closed. When all the shutters are open, the walls



5

themselves are open, transforming the hall into a pavilion through which cooling breezes blow.

Clear spans of up to 70 feet are one of the halls most distinctive features, directly related to the need for big dance floors without columns. A series of attendant buildings complete the typology. A beer stand, a barbeque pit, and shaded picnic tables indicate a dance hall even if, today, the hall is storing hay in the middle of a field.

Some exceptional halls are the twelve-sided Turn Verein (1885) in the Country Fairgrounds at Bellville in Austin County, and the huge Germania Farmer Verein (1908) at Anhalt in Comal County with its 5,600-square-foot dance floor. There is Pat's Hall in Fredericksburg with an open concrete dance floor 120 feet in diameter, shaded by a live oak growing at the center—an idea perhaps at the root of all the polygonal pavilions.

Then there is the Round-Up Hall in the County Fairgrounds at La Grange, the shutters framed into a skin that drops from the ends of roof rafters, clearing the structural frame in anticipation of the curtainwall. And there is the beautiful Applet's Hall off Highway 77 South near I-10 with its elliptical dance floor.

These often complex volumes are engineered with ordinary lumber—usually 2 by 4s

1 Bellville Turn Verein

2 shutters at Renck-Bača Pavilion near Warrenton, Fayette County

3 All that remains of the hall at Dime Box in Lee County is the beer stand.

4 Applet's Hill Shooting Society hall; the plan is a cross with two ends rounded and two ends square.

5 Cat Springs Agricultural Society Hall in Austin County is eight-sided.

and 2 by 6s, and even, in the Praha Church Hall in Fayette County, arched trusses spanning 70 feet made up of 2 by 4s and 1 by 6s. Truly an unusual and unique Texas building type.

Stephanie White

Stephanie White is an architect in Calgary, Alberta; she visited the dance halls while teaching architecture at the University of Texas in the mid-1990s.

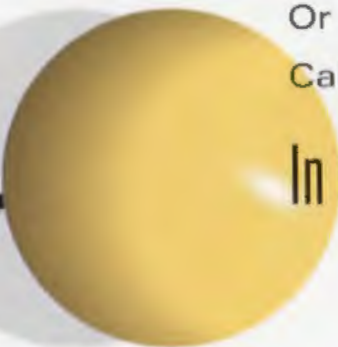
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